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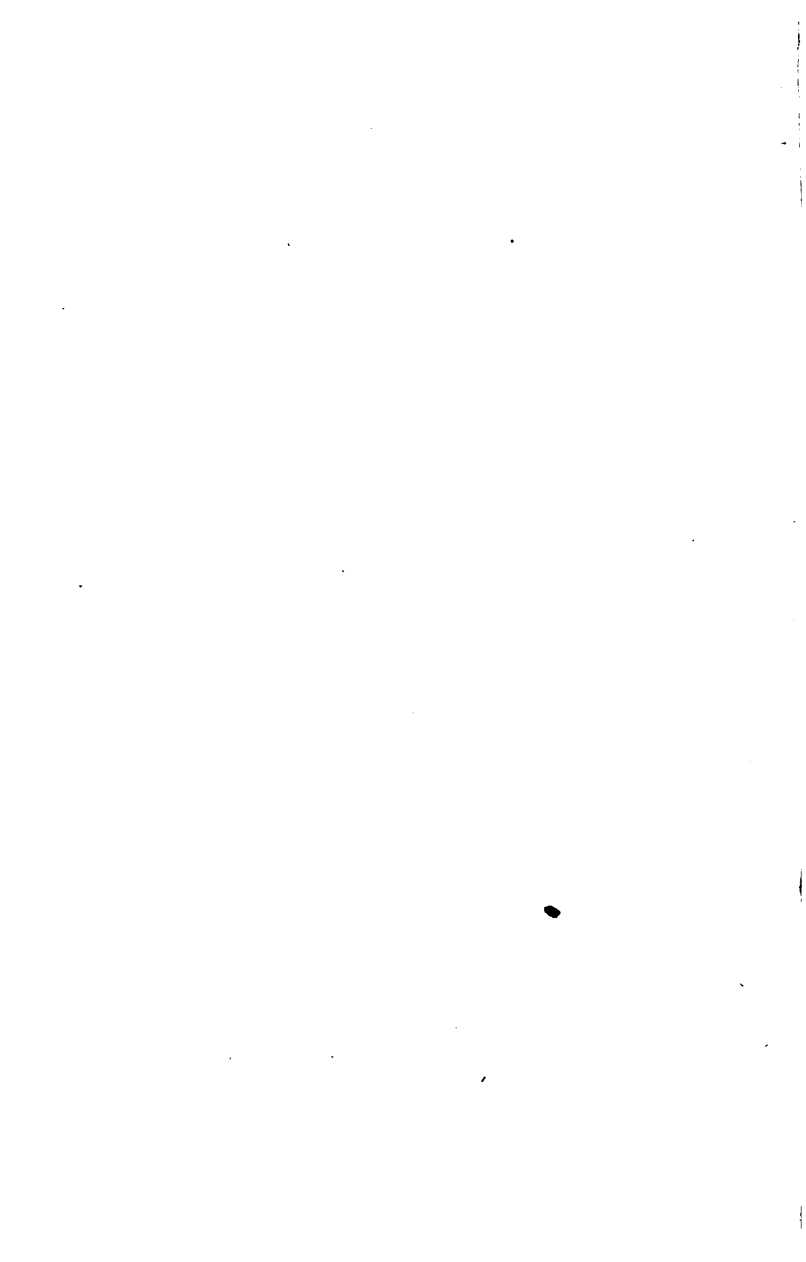
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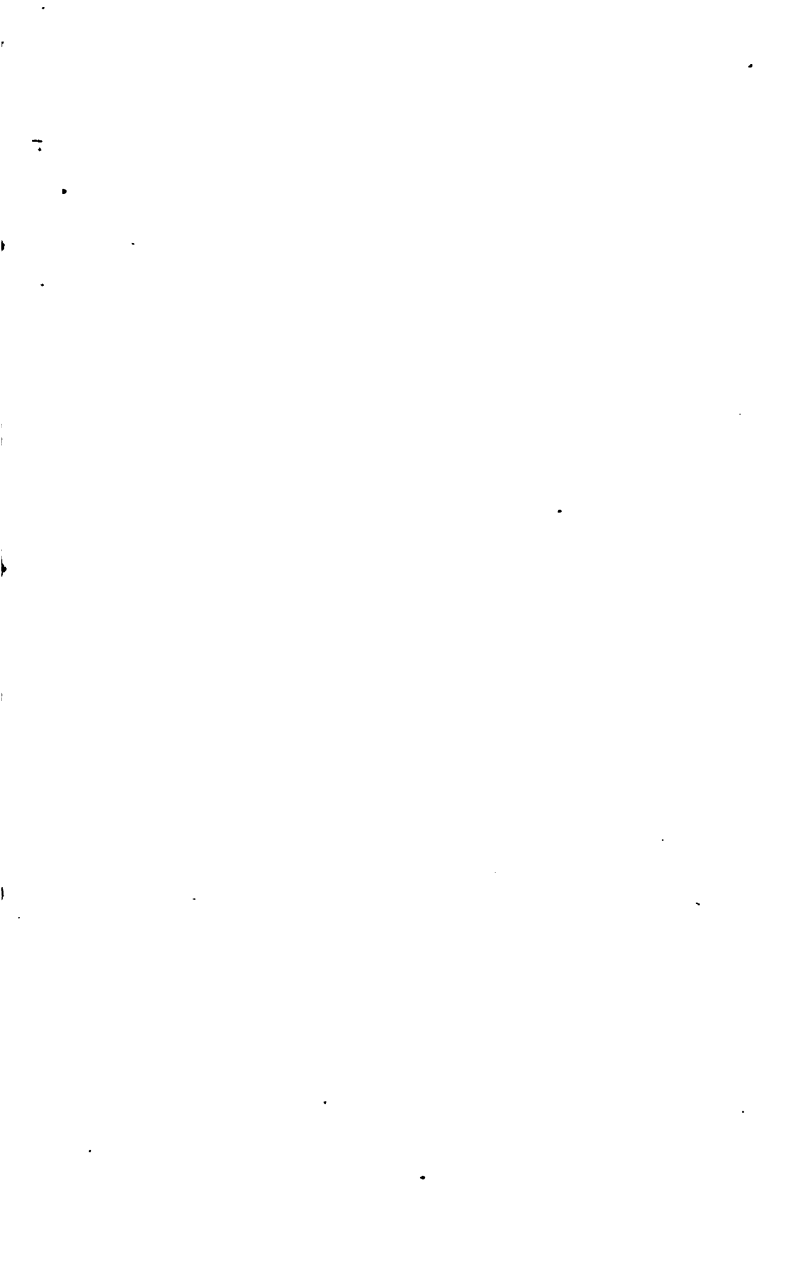
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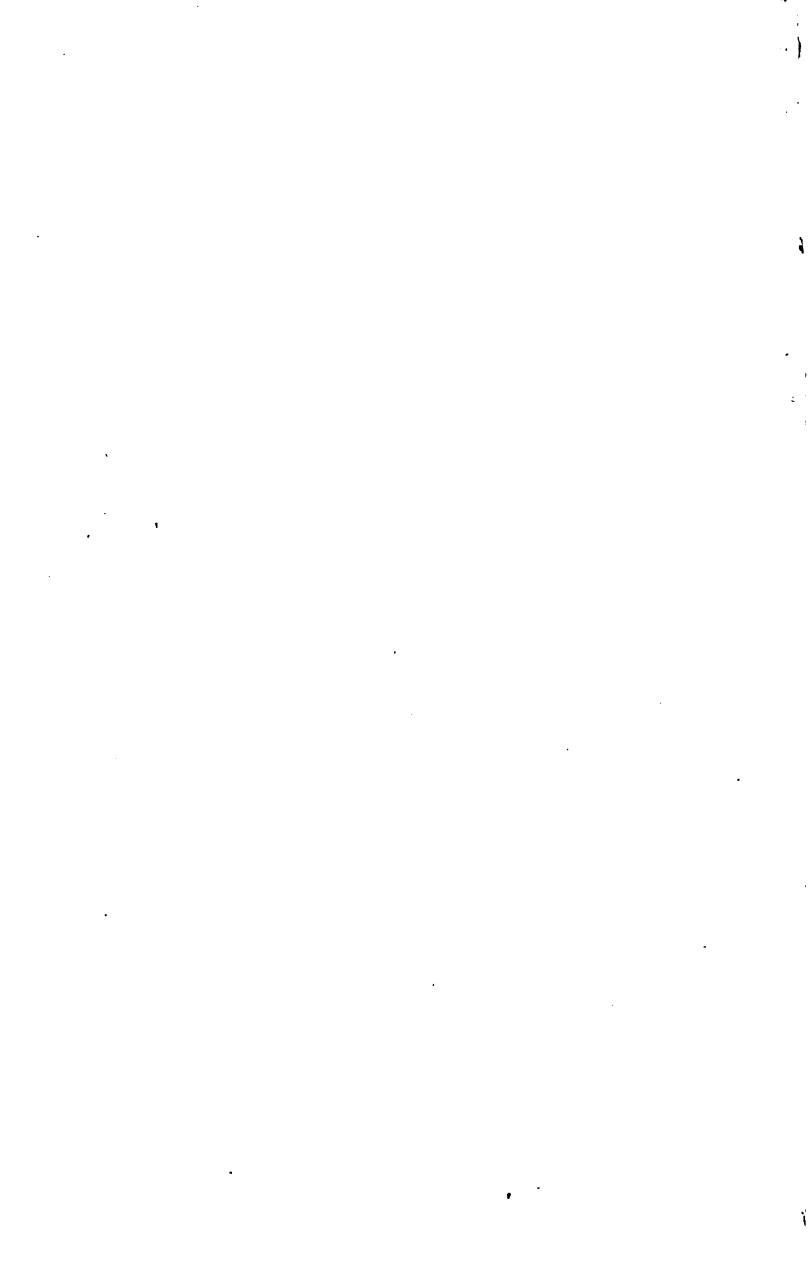
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The Fortune of a Day

The
Fortune of a Day

By
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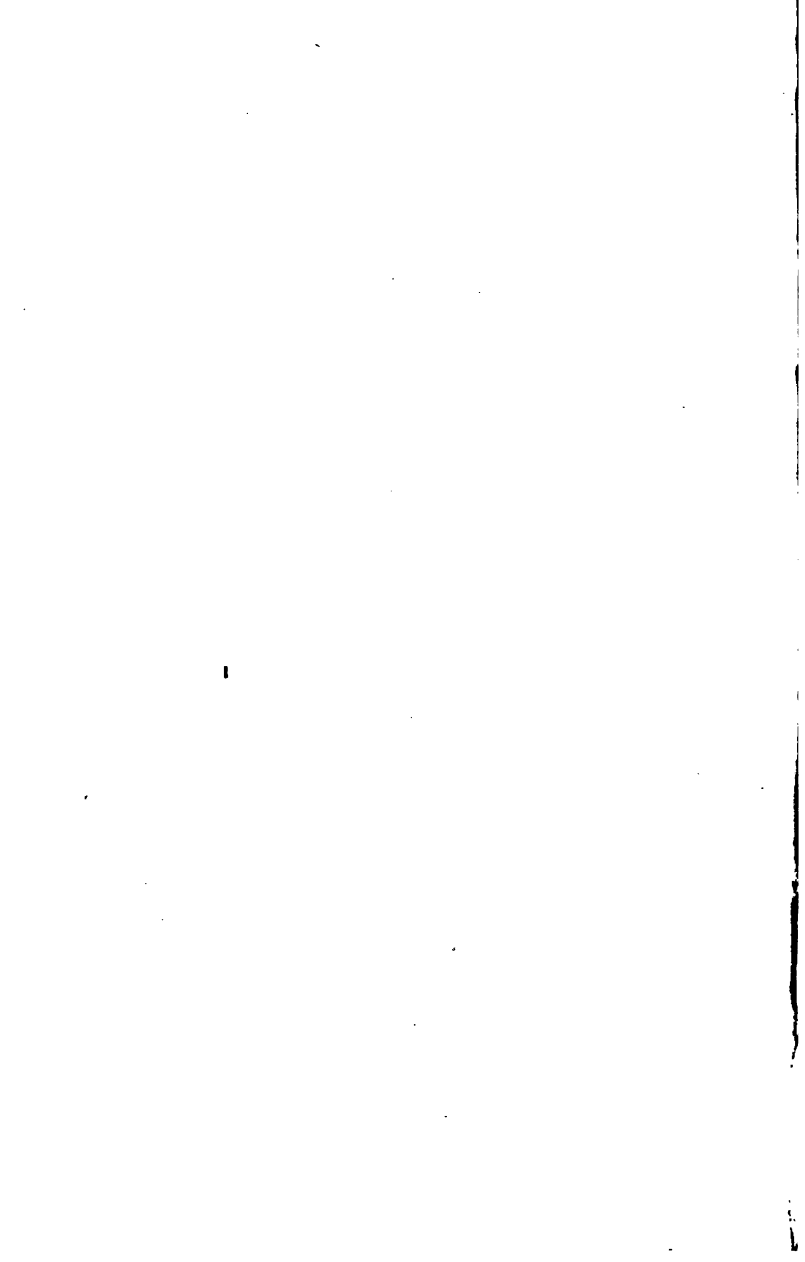
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Some one touched Beppe's arm, in the grey dawn, and he awoke with a start from dozing against Rosellina's flank, and mechanically lifted his hat, while glancing about for the "fare" who had disturbed his slumbers. Then his eye fell upon Margherita, and he started again, and his heart began to thump against the shabby coat.

"Per Bacco! little one—you, so early? What do you want?"

"To go down there," answered Margherita, firmly, pointing in the direction of the valley. "To see the world."

"Per Bacco!"

Beppe was too astonished to say more. He looked at the little figure before him, resting upon its crutch,

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and he, who knew the Margherita best of all, hardly recognised her. Above the fiesta gown and pale rose-coloured kerchief her face showed white with its startling determination.

"Has some one, then, left you a fortune, Margherita?" he asked, with not unkindly irony.

"Yes, the signora who made the picture of me. She paid me last night twenty whole francs, and I made up my mind then to see the world."

Beppe was silent again in sheer astonishment. Such a thing had never happened before in all the years he had driven cabs up and down the hills. He always knew the Margherita was not like the others—ah no! but that such an idea as this should come to even Margherita's head was beyond belief.

"Child," he said, roughly, "money

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is fire and food next winter, and you have not too much of either, and the straw work getting worse every day."

"I shall be hungry and cold anyway—when it is gone; but if I could see once—just once—what it is like down there, I should have that to remember always."

Beppe slipped the feed-bag off Rossellina's nose.

"Jump in," he said, gruffly. "Hand me the crutch; up with you." He gathered the reins, and mounted to his own seat. "Are you ready?"

Margherita nodded. She sat bolt upright, with her crutch beside her, and the colour blazing and fading in her cheeks.

"Believe me!" muttered Beppe, "that signora was no fool. There are not two pairs of eyes like that in Tuscany."

Margherita breathed in gasps as the

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carriage rolled down the winding Way. She had never been beyond the Piazza. There were old men and women in the commune who had never been farther. Only the sturdy ones who could tramp the miles, or those of the restless younger generation who seemed born with the fever of wandering, which had never attacked their ancestors, or the well-to-do among them (and they were few), went, at great intervals, to buy or barter in "the city." There was no other city in the world to them. With Margherita's back, walking was impossible, and certainly nobody else ever dreamed of deliberately paying out good money to drive anywhere. That belonged to foreigners and the "signori."

In the wonder of it, Beppe left the way to Rosellina, who could be trusted to know it, and turned sideways on his seat.

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“Up there—what do they say to this?”

“They do not know. I slipped out *pian'piano*, so that no one heard. I knew you would be at the Piazza.”

Beppe whistled. “What, you are doing it under the plate! Santa Maria! take my advice; never tell them of all that money.”

“They know. Emilia was there when the signora gave it to me, and they all came in to talk about it. Emilia wanted me to put it by for oil and *carbone* next winter, and Fiametta said she would buy shoes and flannels.”

“One might do worse; flannels and *carbone* and oil are good in the cold weather.”

“The Costanza said they were all old fools; a red gown, made with a point like the signora's, would be what she would buy.”

“Costanza's head is like her heels—

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the lightest in the Piazza," grunted Beppe, contemptuously.

"But old Marianna," continued the girl, "said one would think, to hear them, money were made just to spend; *she* said put it in a stocking or give it to a good neighbour to keep."

"H—m—m! And with all that good advice what put it into your head, *piccina*, to see the world?"

The spot upon Margherita's cheek burned red.

"I have heard it is so beautiful. Costanza went once—in the Carnivale; and there is no one to take me, like the Costanza. I did want to see—"

Beppe coughed two or three times, and moved uneasily on the seat.

"If I had known, Margheritina, I would have taken you. Though the carriage is not mine, I have some francs laid by—a handful. But you are such

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a quiet little one, who could know you had all that in your head?"

"Cesare says on festas it is a *paradiso*," breathed Margherita, softly, her dreamy eyes gazing as if she already beheld it.

This time there was a scarlet spot on Beppe's cheek, and he frowned.

"Cesare! It is that good-for-nothing, then, who puts ideas in your head?"

"He is good to his mother, and he is good to me."

"Good to you? Who would be anything but good to you?" retorted Beppe, gruffly, "all alone in the world, and with a back like that. Why does he not settle down like others, instead of running to the city all the time? No, no, a face like that spoils a lad; he is too handsome to do any good in the world. Not that I say anything against seeing the world a

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little—" He straightened himself up and looked important. "I have seen it myself in my day. I was never one of those who think Fiesole is all the good God made. But as for Cesare—he and Costanza will make a fine pair; not that I would advise the Costanza to get her black gown ready till the day before they go to the priest."

"He danced only once with her at the Fair," said Margherita, very low, while her slight hands gripped the crutch as if they would dent it.

"*Chè, chè*—one does not waste money on maids for nothing, and I myself heard her ask him to bring her some beads from the city, and he laughed and never refused. She will spend his soldi prettily. Altro!"—he shrugged his shoulders—"we won't quarrel over the lad; leave that to the

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girls." And he drew himself up exceedingly straight and began to hum an air with great indifference.

*"O mia . . . come sta?
Oggi sto bene, ma domani chi sa."*

"I am an old fool—an old fool!" he thought.

They rode in silence down the historic Way, winding between the walls of stately villas and gardens, over which fragmentary marbles peered—nymphs and goddesses and gods. Beppe knew something of these stone pages of history, but Margherita knew nothing. Seventeen years comprised all her past, and the future stretched before her exactly like unto it, a future of interminable straw-plaiting in the doorway of the same little house beyond high Fiesole, with the same struggle summer and winter to keep food in the mouth, shoes on the feet, and a drop of oil in the lamp to plait more straw by.

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But what was the future to her now? This day was hers.

They were at the foot of the hill already, following the slender ribbon of the Mugnone.

"The Queen of England stays there," Beppe gruffly remarked, pointing his whip towards the Villa Palmieri. Had he known enough to call it the Villa Decamerone, what would that have meant to Margherita? As little as to say, "Yonder is the studio where Arnold Böcklin starved on beans and painted for many a year," or "These very stones Dante walked on and the great Lorenzo clattered over."

All at once Beppe drew up his reins and halted Rosellina.

"Listen! Do you hear that, Margherita?"

A sound of many mingled sounds, strange as the voice of the sea to inland

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ears, thrilled through Margherita's veins.

"That is the world." He straightened his shabby hat, drew himself erect, and flourished his whip, starting Rosellina into an ungainly canter. This was the proper manner of entering the city. Margherita had a dizzy vision of many houses, carriages, horses, and people as the cab clattered through the barrier, Beppe holding up both hands, palms open, in an expressive assurance to the guards that there was not a soldo's worth of cheese or a flask of *vino rosso* in the carriage trying to escape honest taxes.

Proud, yet fearful, Margherita looked up at the rows of frowning palaces.

"If the Costanza could see me now," she thought.

"These are the houses of the signori," said Beppe,—“people who lie abed till noon, eat out of silver plates,

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and would as soon swallow a gold-piece as I a fig, and never feel it. *Ma chè*, these are nothing; wait till you see the palace of the King. But first I will show you something better than any king's palace, and that belongs to us as much as to anybody."

He touched up Rosellina, and at her ungainly gallop she whirled them through the echoing stone alleys and across an open square, where Beppe dexterously reined her in with much suddenness upon her haunches, in the manner learned from his Florentine brethren of the cab.

"*Eccolo!*"

"*O bella! O bellissima!*" was all Margherita could sigh, her eyes climbing from the mass of rose and white and fair colored marbles of the vast cathedral to where a hundred doves circled about the fairer tower which has no rival in the whole round world.

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“He who built that was once our own little Giotto,” said Beppe, “a boy like any one of Pietro’s eight or Maso’s up there in Fiesole. Get out and go in, Margherita; it is the good God’s—not like the houses of the signori—and He is always at home. In there it is fine, and the priests say a little prayer never does any harm.”

He lifted her out, and watched her go up the great steps, his weather-beaten face softening strangely, as the grim old Florentine palaces do under the late sunglow. As the heavy leathern door-curtain fell behind the young girl, he crossed himself.

“There is no more religion anywhere,” he thought; “but for such as her the saints ought to do something still.” Then with a lofty air he beckoned to the vendor standing at the foot of the tower with corn-filled cornucopias. He handed the man a

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soldo in exchange for one of the yellow papers, not without grumbling that a centesimo would be liberal for such foolishness as the cornucopia contained; whereupon the vendor held up both hands and bade Beppe reflect upon the iniquity of taxes and the size of the standing army, solely maintained by his own disinterested efforts in the sale of cornucopias. Beppe's response was an eloquent shrug—a Tuscan shrug, differing in form and substance of eloquence from a Roman or Neapolitan kindred token—ere he turned his attention to the large door by which Margherita should emerge.

Meanwhile, her crutch tapping step by step on the marble floor, she stood beneath the mighty dome in the dim, vast space. Twenty years Brunelleschi gave to round that dome, and Margherita took it for the work of God merely. Neither constraint nor fear

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oppressed her. Here, as Beppe said, the child of the Church "belonged" as truly as the elegantly dressed signora beside whom she presently kneeled to make the little prayer recommended of Beppe. It resolved itself into the same words over and over: "O Madonna! Lord God! Jesus Christ, and all the saints beside, I thank you for letting me see the world."

"Santa Maria!" murmured Beppe when Margherita appeared again at the top of the marble steps; "if the signora could see her now!"

"I made also a prayer for you, Beppe," said the young girl, looking at him with her eyes still full of splendor and dreams.

"Thank you, Margherita," stammered he; "they will hear you if anybody." And he thrust the cornucopia into her hand, and turned to Rosellina to hide his emotion. "Who

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knows," he thought; "after all, who knows—"

"Per Bacco!" ejaculated a voice behind him. "That is the prettiest face in all Florence. What a pity—"

Beppe wheeled. Two signori, pausing in their promenade, were gazing where Margherita, brilliant and laughing with delight, stood with her arms full of doves and a hundred glancing wings, eager bills, and bright eyes flashing about her.

"Altro," said the second gentleman, "with a face like that, what does the rest matter? All the saints—what eyes!"

Some one else turned, too, at the words, a slender lad wearing his shabby cap debonairly. There was an exclamation:

"Santa Maria! it is the little Margherita!"

"Cesare!" The yellow cornucopia,

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with all its grain, fell at her feet, a whirl of doves rose startled through the air, and Margherita stood paling and flushing alternately, her wide eyes shining on the newcomer.

He, on his part, remained staring at her, repeating to himself the words of the signori, "The prettiest face in Florence!" How had he ever helped noticing, in fact, how pretty she was—the prettiest girl in the Piazza, by all odds.

"May Cesare come, too?" Margherita interrogated Beppe timidly.

"It costs no more," answered Beppe, drily.

Cesare waited for no further invitation. He was consumed with curiosity to know how Margherita came to be there—a miracle whose magnitude he was abundantly able to estimate. Moreover, a ride in a carriage is not to be sneezed at at any time; and finally,

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the Margherita was certainly very, very pretty, with all that color in her cheeks and her eyes like lamps.

"Tell me, Margherita mia," he began at once, "what miracle brought you here? For believe me, I should have looked to see Our Lady herself as soon."

"It was the signora's money. What you said is all true, Cesare; it is a *paradiso*." She looked at him so that he felt himself all amazed and dizzy again.

"Diavolo, little one, but you have courage!" he said aloud. To himself he kept thinking, "Who would ever have believed the Margherita had it in her. She has twice the spirit of that big Costanza, who would never venture in a whole year of festas; and if her back is not so straight as some, better a crooked back than a wooden head"—which meant that big Costanza again.

"If you think this a paradise, Mar-

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gherita," he said aloud, "you should see it to-night. It is the day of the *Statuto*, and there will be illuminations."

But Margherita scarcely heard him. The long narrow streets of unimaginable splendors, shop-windows glittering with luxuries, stately buildings, richly dressed people, passed before her eyes like phantasmagoria of a dream; a soundless tumult in her heart shut out the very sound of words. She had been a dreamer all her life, unlike her active, hardy companions of the village; she was dizzy now with the coming true of all her dreams together—oh, more than all her dreams!"

Beppe, however, driving in silence, his old eyes gazing straight ahead, heard every word that fell from the lad's lips—all the chatter of events, the little city anecdotes, the bits of town-gathered wit and wisdom which

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the boy had picked up in those days of absence deplored of the home commune, and which he now set forth brightly for Margherita's entertainment, deferentially for Beppe's. Nor was that deference lost upon the grizzled cabman, who had his own ideas of manners and modesty. He kept an unrevealing dumbness, quite unlike Margherita's, which was of a kind to cheapen every other form of response. All up and down the narrow streets he drove them grimly—past the open markets, by the vanities of gold and millinery, out to the Cascine, where at last Rosellina took a tranquil place in the line of liveried turnouts comprising the high life of Florence. And oh, comedy of the human heart! To Margherita it seemed a million times less wonderful and unthinkable to be riding among dukes and princes of blood royal than to be riding beside Cesare,

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his shabby jacket brushing her faded gown, his supple brown hands and laughing eyes talking as ceaselessly as his merry tongue, and all for her, to her, for her pleasure and delight. Scarcely did she note when they left the stream of grand dukes, princelets, and *contessinas* to flash from out a maze of darkening streets upon a bridge. Beneath that bridge something went by in a golden glitter under the low sun, and the bridge was a-glitter, also, with the silver and gold of jewelers' booths.

"The Arno!" said Cesare, proudly. "They say this bridge was here—who knows how long ago? My father and my grandfather saw it."

More beautiful to Margherita than the river or the bridge seemed the treasure of gold and silver trinkets, such as her eyes had never seen. Cesare's eyes followed her wistfully

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admiring glance, and his hand stole once or twice to his pocket to be withdrawn again, with an odd look of embarrassment.

"The palace of the King," Beppe was saying the next minute, and there in fact was the great mass of the Pitti frowning down upon them. Guards in scarlet stood before its awful doors.

"They say there are wonders to be seen in there—rooms and rooms full of nothing but pictures, for one thing. I brought the signora often to see them. Who knows, Margherita, perhaps yours is there now."

"I went in once," said Cesare, "but the signora's picture was not there then—nothing half so pretty. I saw them all—faded old ones, for the most part, not half so beautiful as those one sees in the windows on the Lung' Arno. What *is* beautiful is the garden yonder, the Boboli; Margherita

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ought to step in a moment, Beppe—beautiful long walks and statues and fountains and seats.”

“Go on in, child,” was Beppe’s response. “You don’t mind going alone for five minutes? If Cesare here will hold Rosellina, I’ll just stretch my own legs a little.”

“*Volontieri*,” replied Cesare, politely, though with some secret wonder, seeing that Rosellina was known to stand faster than the very stones by the hour together. Beppe, however, handed him the reins and made a great fuss stamping about on the pavement, while the slender figure, so swift in spite of its crutch, was disappearing under the arch of the garden. Then he resumed his seat with a brief “Grazie,” but did not offer to relieve Cesare of the reins; instead he slowly proceeded to light a long ten-centesimi cigar.

“There is one who has a heart,” he

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said, gruffly, between puffs, nodding vaguely backwards. "And a head as well. One who would do what she has done to-day can think for herself and others, too. There isn't another in all Fiesole who would have the courage."

"You have reason, Beppe," answered Cesare, with warmth. "My mother always says she has the best heart and the quickest fingers at the straw work of any girl in Fiesole."

"Your mother is a woman of sense. All Fiesole knows that. As for this one, he who gets a *sposa* with a heart and a face like that has not much to be pitied for."

"In fact, the Margherita is very pretty—"

"Pretty! Up there they know nothing; that fat Costanza passes for pretty, but in the city one sees the difference. You heard the signori—

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and all the world stares at the child. The truth is, she is thrown away up there; she was made for the city. Altro—if I were younger myself—”

“*Chè*,” protested Cesare, but rather faintly; “you are young enough yet, Beppe.”

“No, no; I am too old to change, even for the Margherita. What would you?” He shrugged deprecatingly. “To give up driving after twenty years of it, and settle down in a little shop—” Cesare looked up with a start, but Beppe paid no heed. “Not but that a little shop, with butter, eggs, and good fresh milk to sell, and the folk coming to buy and say a word over the counter, and maybe later on a little *podere* of one’s own, with one’s own cow or two and chickens, just beyond Fiesole, to supply the shop—that isn’t so bad—with the city to walk about in, in the evenings, too. Yes,

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yes, if I were younger that is what I would do with the handful of francs I've laid by. With a face like Margherita's behind the counter, buyers would be plenty, and the child has so much *gentilezza*! As for being quick at figures—altro! Yes, yes, if I were younger! but after driving cabs for twenty years, one's habits are formed—" He shrugged again.

"In fact," said Cesare, faintly, "it would be a sacrifice."

"A sacrifice!" Beppe puffed till he was completely enveloped in smoke, out of which his voice came muffled. "There are some things one can't do. But I've been thinking," he added, "lately, there is all that money doing no good instead of making more money as it ought; and here is the Margherita working her hands off at the straw work, which gets worse every day, and I without a chick or child of

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my own. If only she had a good husband to look after things a little, it would be a good thing for her, and for me, too. I could put those francs to use, and not wake up every time a pebble rattles for fear of thieves. After all, I have seen the child grow up as if she were my own, and I wish her as well—or nearly. Even the priest says she is a pearl. He who marries her would not need to be afraid of Paradise; she will take care of him here and his soul after. If he were good to her, that is.” He paused ominously.

“Who could be anything but good to the Margherita?”

“Some devil,” answered Beppe, grimly.

There was a pause, Beppe puffing fiercely. Then Cesare spoke:

“Beppe—” His voice was almost timid, but his handsome eyes looked

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frankly into those turned keenly on him. He drew a small package diffidently from his pocket and displayed the contents.

"All that you have said there is very true, and—I've been thinking—I should like to give these to the Margherita. She hasn't any—I happened to buy these—" He broke off with a look of mingled embarrassment and humour. "What do you say?"

"Altro," returned Beppe, bluntly. "I say not everything finds its way to the pocket it was bought for. Why shouldn't you give it to the child?"

"It isn't good enough for her," said Cesare, regretfully contemplating the gift. "For another it would not matter, but for the Margherita—"

"She will think it good enough," interposed Beppe, gruffly. "Here she comes now." He busied himself tuck-

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ing the worn robe about him, and left to Cesare the task of assisting the young girl.

"The nightingales were singing in there," said Margherita only, whose words were few, but whose eyes said volumes.

"Aye, they do sing well," assented Beppe, "those little things. It goes to my heart to eat them; only a soldo apiece you give for them—whole strings of them, and such little things, a mouthful, and all that music gone down your throat."

"Poor things!" responded Cesare, sympathetically. "But one must say that they are good eating, with olives and a leaf of bay on each side of their little bodies and a scrap of toast outside—a mouthful for their little heads and two for their bodies. Speaking of mouthfuls, Beppe, if we drove to a restaurant! Margherita here has eaten

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nothing but a crust since daybreak, and Rosellina will like a bite as well as we. I have a friend who keeps a place—”

“You have a head on your shoulders, Cesare.” Beppe nodded approvingly. “As for me, I have an appetite of beasts; no nightingales for me, but a good *risotto* or macaroni.”

It was on the way to the restaurant that Cesare laid a little package in Margherita's lap, saying, with the air of a young prince bestowing a coronet:

“*Ecco*, Margherita, a nothing-at-all; but it will keep you from forgetting the day you saw the world.”

Margherita clasped the string of golden glass beads dumbly; she did not break out into loud ecstasy as Costanza would have done, but Cesare was not disappointed for that.

“*Grazie, grazie*, Cesare — *tanto, tanto!*” she murmured at last. They were prettier than any girl's in Fiesole.

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What would Costanza say—Costanza, who had asked him to bring her such an one?

Beppe, looking sedately elsewhere, smiled the first smile of that day. "That settles the big Costanza. One does not spend soldi on maids for nothing," he thought, with grim satisfaction.

Meanwhile Cesare was protesting gaily. "It is nothing, Margherita, nothing. Altro! put it on, and it will be better." And as they were passing through the dim Way of the Red Gate it was not to be wondered at that in the dusk he made a strangely awkward piece of work of it, and was very long fastening the clasp at the back of her neck. To tell the truth, he felt a sudden overwhelming desire to put a kiss just under the necklace where all the soft curls met. Never had he known such a desire before and resisted it,

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but a timidity wholly new seized him, and with a muttered "*Scusi!*" he withdrew his hands from the beads, and sat with cheeks more burning than Margherita's, biting his lips.

"She isn't like the others," he thought, with mingled pleasure and pain.

At the restaurant he recovered all his easy grace, and did the honours of the place with an air which dazzled Margherita to whom this glimpse of high life was a little disconcerting. She ate her *risotto* and sipped her glass of thin red wine almost dumbly. Cesare, however, was in spirits for all three, and filled his companions' glasses with the manner of a lord of the feast. Rosellina meanwhile resumed her breakfast precisely at the point where she had left it off; though a female, Rosellina was a philosopher.

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"Put up your money, little one," said Cesare, with a proprietary air, when Margherita timidly brought out the handkerchief in which her fortune was tied. "I have a few soldi myself." He laughed to hide some embarrassment, for to say truth he had forgotten about the beads, and his pocket was nearly empty. He went to arrange the matter with his friend, but Beppe followed.

"See here, Cesare," he interposed, touching him on the arm, "I pay for this. Santa Maria, man, you spent half a lira at least on those beads, and it's only the foreigners who are made of money. A franc and a half, is it? Altro! No one can say we haven't lived like signori to-day." He slipped the money into the lad's hand.

"Thank you, Beppe," said Cesare, gratefully. "The truth is, I forgot about the beads, and half a lira does

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make a hole in one's pocket—not that I would begrudge the Margherita a whole lira if I had it," for by this time Cesare had quite forgotten for whom the beads were originally bought.

"And now for the illumination," said Beppe; "not that they need illuminate if they saw your eyes, little one." For what with the wine, excitement, and gaiety Margherita's eyes from lamps were become stars.

Cesare, reading in the glance of his friend that he agreed with Beppe, was seized with a sudden jealous haste to get them all started. He insisted there would be no standing-room left on the Piazza, and fairly drove them before him to the cab, in spite of the protests of his friend, who, Cesare noticed, never once looked at Margherita's back, but with open admiration at her face.

The illumination was getting itself in

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train. Streets and palaces blossomed as they rode through with clusters of colored globes—the red, white, and green of Italy. They halted in the dark space of the Piazza Signoria, and waited for the tower of the Old Palace to blossom also. Suddenly the mighty mass began to glow all over, as if the light came from within the stone itself, and there it stood, a gigantic, luminous fire-palace against the stars, and from its top the tri-colour floated. A murmur of rapture rose from thousands. Margherita touched Beppe's arm.

“Why do they light it? Is it for some saint?”

Beppe had taken off his hat. “No, child; it is too long to tell you” (the fact was he did not know very well himself), “but it is for our Italy—because she was made ours again. I was a lad then, like Cesare, but I remem-

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ber. It was to drive out the Austrians and the grand dukes, and get our own again. Every time you see that you ought to thank God for our Italy."

"It is so very good to be Italian then?" asked Margherita, timidly.

"The best thing in all the world," answered Beppe, bluntly.

"That I know," said Cesare. "There is nothing like our Italy; even the foreigners think so, or why do they all come here? I, too, shall fight for her some day, perhaps."

"H—m—m," commented Beppe. "As for fighting, that is an ugly thing; and now that we have our Italy I have no great *furia* to fight any more myself."

The great stone building continued to glow, and all the clocks in the city struck out together.

"Nine o'clock—and all that hill to climb! It will be ten before we are half-

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way home, and we shall have all the folk out with torches looking for us."

A sudden darkness and chill fell upon Margherita.

"And you, Cesare?" inquired Beppe, taking up the reins. "Do we say '*Felice notte*' here, or will you come with us? My Rosellina will carry you like a feather"—which was a fine stroke of imagination on Beppe's part.

"I come, too," replied Cesare, quickly, "unless it displeases Margherita?"

She gave him one fleeting glance, and Cesare stepped in quickly.

"It is stupid down here," he explained, with affected carelessness, "and *mia madre* frets if I am too long away."

"One should know when one has eaten enough," was Beppe's dry comment.

Margherita said nothing at all. She

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leaned back against the shabby cushions, and Florence and the world floated away from her.

It seemed but a moment before the lights of the barrier faded, the dusk fell about them like a curtain, and they were out on the wide sweet hillside under the stars. Rosellina climbed slowly; she had kept so many holidays. Beppe turned to look at the small face so white against the sky.

"Well, little one," he said, with an odd tremble in his voice, "you can say that you have seen the world."

There was no answer, and after a second glance Beppe turned abruptly round upon his seat, and keeping his face straight ahead began to whistle industriously, though softly.

The fireflies twinkled all about them, and the perfume of roses swept down against their faces from the villa gardens, under whose walls they passed.

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Far up a nightingale began its throbbing song. Cesare moved a little nearer.

"You must be tired, *carina*," he said, gently. "See, rest here."

With that new awkwardness he put out an arm and drew her nearer. She did not resist, and her head fell softly on his shoulder. Her eyes burned brighter than the fireflies in the dark. A great tremor seized and held them both mute, constrained, breathless. In the ilexes the nightingale sang on—of love, of summer, of Italy; and suddenly Margherita felt upon her own the burning yet gentle lips of her lover.

Beppe never once turned his head. "*Felice notte*, Beppe," came softly to him, as Cesare slipped from the carriage into the shadows at the border of the village, and he gave back the words as softly. But he did not turn his

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head. How many summers the fireflies had twinkled and the nightingale been singing then as now!

As they drove into the Piazza a clamour of voices, waving arms, and gesticulating heads broke like a wave and surrounded them. The past, with all its fireflies and nightingales, vanished abruptly.

"San Giuseppe, Beppe!" exclaimed the shrill tones of Emilia. "What have you been doing with the child?—and we giving her up for murdered for the money!"

"Where has she been?" shrieked Fiametta.

"And what has she done with the money—that's what I say," interrupted Carlotta.

"Now, now, good people, neighbors, *amici*," said Beppe, deprecatingly, but with a twinkle, "I have but one tongue; and what is it to you what

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the little one has done with her own? The signora gave it to none of you."

"What is it to us?" screamed half a dozen. "And the whole place out of bed with anxiety! A lone child like that, and all those francs!"

Margherita slipped softly down and into the house, as one escapes a buzzing swarm. Perceiving that she was safe, Beppe answered (for he could not refuse himself the satisfaction):

"Well, if you must know, we have been seeing the world a little down there."

Rosellina stood fast, and so did her master.

"Seeing the world!" shrieked Fiametta; "then I warrant the child has thrown away all that money!"

"Didn't I say the fortune had crazed her!" exclaimed Carlotta. "Santa Maria! all that thrown away."

All that thrown away! It produced

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a silence. At length old Marianna spoke, bitterly:

"I always said she was half a fool, but next winter, when it freezes, I warrant her folly won't warm nor feed her."

"And serves her right," answered Carlotta, harshly.

To these it did seem hard. Oil and flannels and food and fuel wasted while old bones might toil and moil.

"So it looks to you," said Beppe; and every one turned with indignation upon him, who, though he might be a party to the crime (it was worth money to him), could scarcely have the face to extenuate it. But Beppe's countenance wore a look of calm conviction.

"So it looks to you," he repeated, "and I don't say you are not right; but this I tell you, the Margherita will never regret those francs, not if she lives to be as old as Mariuccia here."

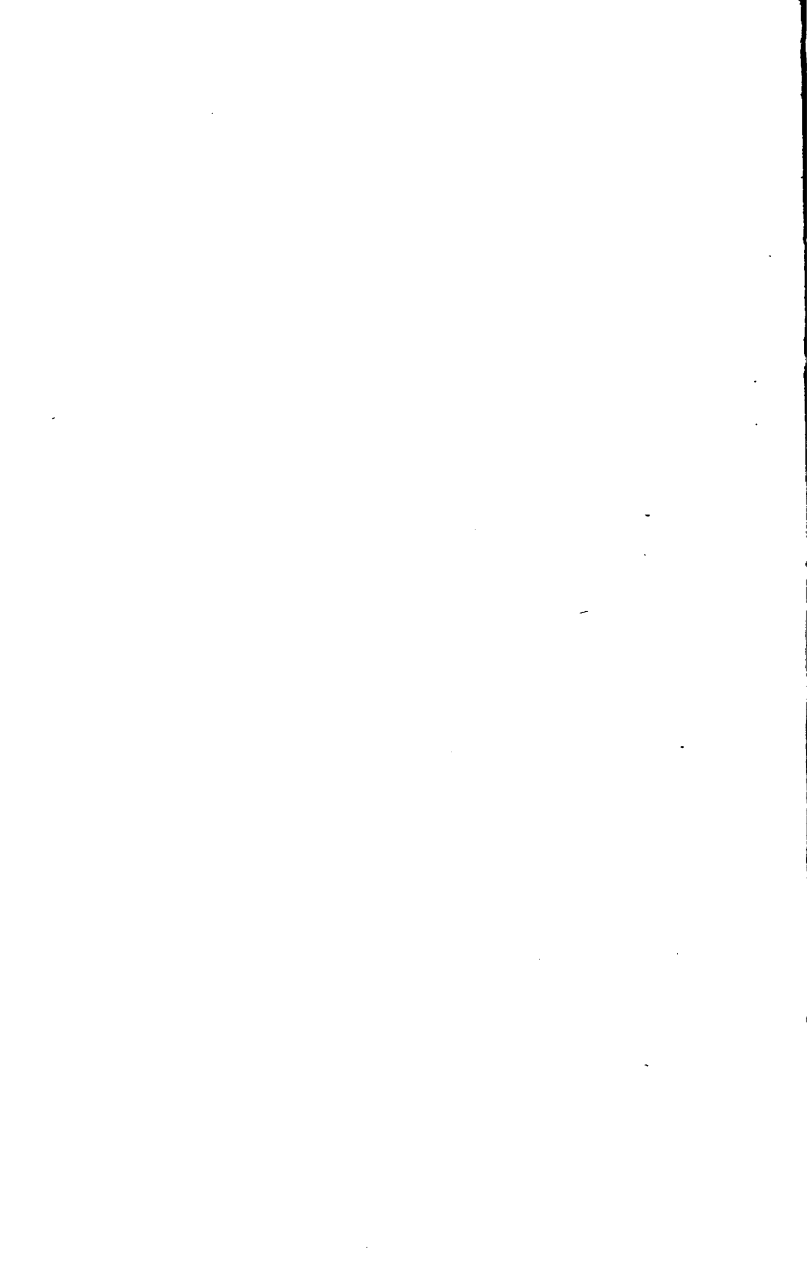
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His words, in spite of the popular indignation, carried weight. In every one's mind there was already a reluctant perception that the Margherita would henceforth be a more important person, as one who had seen the world. Only old Marianna shook her obstinate head.

"I thank the saints I am no such fool nor have any such *pazza* for my daughter."

And the others agreed with her loudly, with some mental reservations; for, after all, to have seen the world is a great thing.

There is, however, a greater. Cesare, dreaming on his narrow bed, Margherita dreaming wide awake on hers, with Cesare's beads clasped to her heart, and Beppe grimly counting out a roll of twenty francs before he added it to his stocking's hoard, in their varying degrees had consciousness of this.



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I

He was a priest of God. Though still young, he had been a priest of God so long that no one, least of all Father Anselmo himself, could remember when he had been anything else.

He had not, however, been born a priest of God, but a merry brown-eyed baby, differing in no wise from all the other babies about him, who were destined for the world and the life of the world—that world and life of which Anselmo knew and desired to know so little. They had become soldiers, men of business, politicians, householders, heads of families—these others. Father Anselmo met them

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often, hurrying hither and thither with cares and anxieties of many kinds written on their foreheads. He looked at them pityingly—immortal souls unconscious of their destiny! They, in turn, were wont to cast upon him one of those singular glances, compounded of reverence and contempt, with which the layman habitually regards the priest.

Many causes had combined to lead Father Anselmo in his youth to choose the better part. He came of a family whose distinction was more than equalled by the smallness of its revenues; the Church offered a refuge alike splendid and honorable to the younger son. These were reasons which influenced his family; there were others far more potent with the boy himself. His temperament led him to all ardent aspirations and mystic imaginings, and he was in Rome—not

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the Rome of the Cæsars, but the Rome of St. Peter's, Christian Rome.

Thirsting for all things high and noble, his heart filled with vague enthusiasms for he knew not what, he was thrown into the arms of the Church, who gave him all he craved, and lifted him like a child to her bosom. The needs and longings he himself could not have uttered, her music put into words for him. He had lost his own mother early; the Mother of God herself, tenfold worshipful, pure of all taint of earth, offered herself to his adoration.

So he became a priest, and proved to have a sublime "vocation." In the Church he had been reared; in the Church he had lived his life; in the Church he would one day die to the life of the body as he had already died to the life of the world, and ascend from the Church militant to the

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Church triumphant. Ave and pater-noster came as naturally to his lips as laughter and light speech to the lips of others.

"He will die in the odor of sanctity," murmured his brother priests. "He is half a saint already."

"Never yet," says à Kempis, "was saint but was sorely tempted." Father Anselmo had been sorely tempted once.

It was long ago, but he remembered always. He remembered the first morning she came to the confessional, and laid open to his priest's gaze every secret fold of her young heart. He was accustomed to searching hearts—those of innocent children and sin-hardened and age-withered men and women; but that morning, for the first time in his priesthood, he experienced a kind of embarrassment, as if he had no right to this unveiled confidence,

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pure as it was—perhaps because it was so pure.

Later, it is true, he grew accustomed to see her kneeling there, and that sense of embarrassment, which certainly had no place in a priest of God, was lost in other feelings.

One of the most precious duties of the priest is the care of the sick, and Anselmo was blessed for his tireless benefactions to all his infirm and afflicted. So surely as the cholera or typhus came, he came also, and over every bed disputed a soul with Death.

It was this peculiar tenderness of spirit which led him first to the house of the slowly dying scholar and stranger, in whom he found a soul kindred to his own, which endeared his ministrations. To do him simple justice, his fidelity would have been the same had she not been there, minis-

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tering with a girl's grace and a woman's insight to them both—consciously to the one, unconsciously to the other.

Father Anselmo was young, and a beautiful face is twice beautiful above a priestly robe. Heaven in endowing him with the attributes of a man of God had not deprived him of the attributes of the man human; in giving him his divine vocation had not taken from him the fire of his expressive eyes, the strong, slender hands, the magnetic manner, the smile like sunshine, and rich caressing tones—gracious possessions everywhere in all professions. This was possibly a divine oversight.

Could he, the priest, absorbed in things spiritual or purest earthly offices foresee a danger? Still less could she, a girl just budding into woman, with no woman near, and with a heart pre-

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pared to venerate her spiritual adviser, "half a saint already, and a whole one when he dies," as they told her everywhere?

Sitting by her father's bedside, if the sound of this saint's voice coming through the open door made her pulses leap, and with his coming into the room something else, like sunshine, entered palpably to her senses, could she guess what it meant? When his word of greeting raised a soundless tumult in her heart, could she guess even then?

To strangers in a strange land, with a sorrow brooding near, what infinite value the one best friend and comforter assumes. Father and daughter, they both revered and clung to Anselmo.

When the young priest had bidden the invalid good night, he would pause for a moment outside to speak a word of counsel or courage with the invalid's

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daughter. Sometimes they strolled in speaking to the border of the little garden, and the distance lengthened and their steps lingered in the sweet dusk of the ilexes. They talked so much, so much in these days. Later, they talked so little.

She went often to confession. Young and alone and soon to be twice lonely, what could be more sweet and comforting than to pour out the weakness and anxieties of her own heart into another, which God had expressly appointed and filled with His own goodness towards her, and in the tones of whose trembling voice, as he absolved and blessed her, she felt the tenderness of God Himself!

The priest was very dear to his people at this time. Something of the tenderness one invoked brooded in his manner to all; some echo of it lingered in his voice. When, absolved and

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blessed, the golden head had flitted from the gloomy little box, and in its stead appeared at the grating a gray, bent, or unkempt dark one, patiently the young priest inclined his ear to the tale of sorrow, sin, discontent, or suffering, and from a heart overflowing with human gentleness came wisdom and inspiration.

"He is a saint, our Padre Anselmo!" said his people. "And so wise! *Maraviglioso!*"

"Madonna bless him!" old Lisa would say—old Lisa, whose daughter had brought shame home to her honest old parents. "He says the Madonna will ask her Son to overlook my Adele's fault because she loved that scamp so much."

"Yes, and he says," added another, piously crossing himself, "that we must all ask Madonna to intercede for us, so we shall be saved, for that the

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blessed Gesù can refuse His mother nothing when she asks Him; He loves her so well!"

By this it will be seen that a gospel of tenderness was preaching itself in the priest's soul. Never, indeed, had he felt so sublime a consciousness of his vocation; never so conscious of power over the souls of others. A zeal that amounted to passion possessed him. "Early and late will I praise Thee, O God!" was his cry. In these days his face wore a look of singular sweetness. "There walks a saint!" people said, turning in the street to gaze again at that removed, angelic countenance.

It is a very old story.

The days lengthened. What had been May ripened into June; June slid subtly into July; the ilexes grew dusty; the sun beat down and withered the Campagna like a crumpled leaf, and in

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Rome itself the heat was great, and strangers fled from the city.

July deepened into August. The dying scholar in the villa grew feebler with each passing day. The priest visited him unceasingly. There came an August twilight, when a thousand perfumes diffused themselves subtly on the moist, warm air; (Who has calculated how many lives the rose alone has betrayed?) when a low star stood over the hills, and the nightingale sang in the shadow. The two stood, as they had stood a hundred times before, in the secluded garden. In her face, a little worn by watching, and shadowed by approaching loss, still life was more eloquent than death; and her eyes as she raised them shyly to the tall young priest were filled with charming, changeful things; the very curves of her lips spoke of an unknown joy.

Anselmo heard the nightingale and

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breathed the rose, and his dark eyes glanced and rested on his companion. Tall and stalwart, he walked silently at her side, more like a young soldier of the cross than a chastened monk, and more like a lover than either.

The girl noted without noting the strong curves of his lips, the resolute chin, the clear look straight from under the straight brows. Did it need all that to make a priest? They were very used to long silences—those silences which speak deeper than words, deeper than anything save perhaps lips on lips in a sweeter silence.

Quite unconsciously to herself there had grown up in the young girl's manner a perfectly innocent coquetry towards the man in the priest—a pure coquetry which is born with love in the heart of every happy woman who feels herself loved, whether she knows it or not. Nothing is more winning

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than such sweet coquetry, and no woman less a coquette than she who possesses it.

Something of this mingled even in the gesture with which she said, raising her eyes to the priest and motioning towards the open windows of the villa, "He is much weaker to-day, is he not?" Tears trembled in her eyes and voice.

The priest bent his head silently in response.

The tears brimmed over; two large ones fell into the rose on her bosom, and she tried visibly to repress the quivering of her lips; but she did not turn away.

Father Anselmo's heart beat painfully. "It is the will of God," he said. "Submit yourself to it, and trust in Him."

The golden head drooped silently, and the priest's heart yearned over it.

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"Remember," he went on, gently, "that your loss is his gain. Think of all his sufferings, and rejoice that their end is near."

The words were the priest's words, but the voice was the voice of a friend, and the hand which touched hers was the hand of a living soul. Its warm pulses sent currents of comfort and strength through her tired heart. The priest, too, felt a quickening thrill at that contact, and hastily withdrew from it. He bent above a rose on the bush to conceal his trouble, and they both were again silent in the dusk, a silence more dangerous than the last.

The sum of that moment's rapid thought revealed itself in the word which broke at last from Father Anselmo's lips:

"And you?" he said; "what will become of you?"

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Her eyes came back to him from some infinite distance.

"I will be a nun," she replied, simply.

"A nun!" Anselmo started violently. He felt a shock, a recoil, an electric thrill of horror and dismay. He stared horrified at the calm, blue-eyed countenance, as if those rosy lips had just uttered impious blasphemies.

"A nun!—you!" he repeated. "Impossible!"

She looked at him amazed, stupefied.

"Impossible!" repeated the priest, "impossible!"

Like a flash the future comprehended in her words unrolled itself before him. He saw the vows pronounced, the solemn vocation entered upon, the golden hair shorn, the head forever hidden behind the iron grating, the seal set forever on that young life, that life immured where his eyes should see no

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more, his ears hear no more, his heart no more have cognizance of hers. It came home to him in one moment of anguished horror, and everything that had slumbered within him through his youth and manhood awoke with a bound.

“Impossible!” he repeated, violently; “impossible!”

He seized her arm; he almost shook her in his anger, and with his burning eyes gazed into hers. And then he fell back, speechless, before the look which beamed upon him.

“Why not? you are a priest.”

Why not? The priest looked helplessly to earth and heaven for an answer, and earth and heaven offered none; instead his desperate glance encountered two heavenly eyes. There was an involuntary movement—the impulse of two natures which nothing on earth at that moment could have

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kept apart—the next she was lying in his arms. The question was answered.

Twenty years of repression, of heart-hunger, avenged themselves in one instant. The defrauded kisses of all his youth were blent in the long one he laid upon her lips. Heaven and earth had quietly withdrawn. He was no longer a priest, he had never been a priest; accidents of life and training fell away, and only the primal pair, the Man and the Woman, remained.

His hand, seeking for hers, caught in the rosary at his side; impatiently he tore it from him, and it fell upon the grass unheeded. In that moment he was not busy with rosaries.

She made no effort, but rested in his arms unresisting, undesiring. He was her only will, and the lover knew it.

What power, then, of memory, of conscience, of honour, of duty, habit, tradition, could reach him at that

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height and draw him back? What strength exceeding the strength of nature—what second nature, stunned for an instant by the passionate onslaught, cried out the next more loudly than nature's self?

Such power there was. It tore his lips from hers, wrenched his arms away, hurled her back upon the rose-bushes, and sent him rushing through the darkness like the madman he was.

II

Through hours of anguish he grovelled on the floor of his room; what tortures the soul wrought on the body and body requited to the soul, matters not. Bitterer still were the hours he passed with his spiritual superior. After a lifetime of listening to such confessions, the good Father had grown adept in dealing with his penitents. Other priests before now had come on their knees with tales like this. Other voices before this had accused themselves of every vileness in his sight and God's. He was acute in divining the souls of men under the priest's frock, and he showed this acuteness now by abstaining from any offer of solace to Father Anselmo.

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He did not tell him such a sin was, after all—not a venial sin, of course, nor lightly to be overlooked—but still comprehensible and pardonable to the youthful blood of a faithful servant of the Church. But he reminded him that the flesh is a grievous trial, that there is joy in heaven over a repentant sinner, and that, moreover, this had been rather a temptation to sin than a sin proper, seeing that his guardian angel had saved him from the total fall.

“The Blessed Virgin and all the saints be praised, my son, that you did not wrong the maiden!” he said. “Sin and indiscretion of a surety you have committed, but these may be atoned.”

Much more serious did the good Father become when he learned the second clause of the penitent’s offence.

“Far graver is this offence, which

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you make but light of—the interposing to deter a soul from its religious vocation. It is a deadly sin, my son. You say her father has worldly fortune?”

“Somewhat, I believe—I know not,” came from the pallid lips of the suffering priest.

The superior cast a glance of some anger at the kneeling penitent. “Collect yourself, my son,” said he, with asperity, “and endeavour to consider what atonement is in your power to make, for grievous has been your sin.”

“Alas! I know it—miserable that I am!” moaned Anselmo. “I am the lowest, the vilest; she was in my care!”

“Think less of her and more of the Church, my son!” interrupted the Father, severely.

Anselmo was silent a long moment. Then he lifted his white face. “It is

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useless, Father; I try, but I cannot. I think of her only!"

The Father looked at him with mingled pity and contempt.

"Well, well, my son," he said, soothingly. "Patience! Satan will not be cast out at once, but prayer, and still more, atonement, will prevail. Do the thing which lies in your power; it will bring peace to your soul."

"I will do anything, Father," murmured Anselmo, "except forget her."

"Holy Church is reasonable, my son, and lenient. She does not ask impossibilities, nor even great efforts, though she can command all. Small offerings please her best. You will write to the maiden—"

"Father!"

There was a slight compression of the lines about the elder priest's mouth.

"I say, my son, you will write to

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her asking pardon for your grievous sin."

"Ah!"

"And for your still more grievous sin in seeking to turn her from her vocation; for whereas the other was but a sin against a sinful human being, this is a sin against God and His Holy Church. You will do penance by using your influence—if she be like other women, you will have much—to justify her choice. Do this at once. I myself will be the bearer of your letter."

"Father!"

"My son!" frigidly.

Anselmo was silent with a tumult of passions warring within. Suddenly he buried his face in his hands. It was the moment for which the astute elder man had been waiting. He laid his hands upon the bowed shoulders.

"Courage, my son!" said he, ten-

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derly. "The trial is bitter, but it will not last forever. Though He suffers His saints to be afflicted, they shall not be utterly cast down. The mercy of God is boundless. Do your duty, and you shall not only win peace yourself, but bring her to peace also."

There was a movement of the bent head.

"If you have sown the seed of sinful hope and passion in this woman's heart, lead her now in the way of light. Where but in the bosom of the Church will her bruised spirit find balm and consolation. Will you leave her alone, the prey of unscrupulous men in the world? You have taken from her the peace of earth"—Anselmo shuddered—"give her the peace of heaven! And your gift will be greater than that you have taken from her. In the world she can only live to despise

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and curse you, but once safe, through your influence, in the peace of the Church, she will remember you with gratitude and thankfulness. Nay, more," went on the wise Father, "it is not only allowed, but enjoined the children of the Church to love each other in Christian tenderness. Though parted in the flesh, she will be permitted to love you in this wise, and after death who knows if you will not dwell in spiritual nearness. Who knows but it may be yours to place the saint's crown upon her head. Ah, my son!" exclaimed the good priest, in accents of moving tenderness, "what joy on earth comparable to that! What are the sorrows of the flesh to the eternal felicity of the spirit! What the sacrifice of an hour to the benediction everlasting! If you love her indeed, lift up your love, make it a love for which you will not blush in

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heaven. Devote yourself, your own salvation, to the salvation of this woman's soul. That will be a task worthy of supreme love itself."

Anselmo dropped his hands from his face. "Father, I am ready."

"Rise, rise, my son," cried the elder, enthusiastically. "Begin the blessed work this moment. Here are pen and paper; may heaven inspire your words!"

Obedient to the outstretched hand and commanding accents, Anselmo moved to the table and took up the pen. He dipped it in the ink mechanically, and paused. What was he to say? Without stopping to breathe, he dashed some impassioned words of prayer, of penitence, of remorse, on the paper—some incoherent message; and then a violent revulsion came. Her face rose between the paper and him, and he snatched the letter and tore it into fifty fragments.

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A fresh sheet was instantly laid before him.

"Courage, my son; try again," said the priest's voice, imperturbably.

Again and again Anselmo repeated the miserable attempt and the ignominious failure, until the Father himself lost patience.

"Is this your love—I say not of God, but of *her*, my son?" he demanded, sternly. "You are adding to your sin with every moment."

He laid one more sheet of paper before Anselmo. "Here," he said, authoritatively; "it is the warrant of her soul's salvation which lies before you. Do you refuse to sign it?"

The wretched priest bowed his head in silence, and with white lips he wrote a few shaking lines, signed it passionately, and started up from his chair.

"I can do no more, Father; it must answer." He turned away exhausted.

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The elder man cast his eye over the paper. "I am the vilest of sinners," it ran, "but I will pray for you without ceasing. Be a nun, since it is the will of God, and pardon and pray for the wretched Anselmo. Pardon! pardon!" was dashed below.

The Father was far from being satisfied with this production, the fruit of so many hours of obdurate wrestling; but he, as well as his penitent, was worn out, and he wisely contented himself with having carried his point so far. Much might be done, he reflected, upon this basis, with a reinforcement of personal presence. He himself would go to the villa, bear the note, talk with this erring daughter of Eve, and explain to the dying father that Anselmo had been summoned away on an important mission. As for Anselmo, he had looked his last on the dangerous ground of the villa.

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This dictum the young priest accepted without a murmur. The dying man's hours would be lonelier, lacking his ministrations. It was one of the wide-spreading ripples of his sin. He bowed himself submissively to the rod.

A nominal penance was assigned him. The elder priest had sense enough to divine that with a nature like this he should rather need to tax his skill to lighten the real suffering than augment it; the arbitrary penance served this end.

The good Father was nearly as exhausted as Anselmo when he dismissed him, and as he threw himself heavily into his comfortable chair he closed his eyes with an involuntary thanksgiving that all the souls in his care were not of the stuff that saints are made of; then, horrified, he crossed himself in pious haste.

III

What did she say? What would she do? In what manner did she receive his message? It was the heaviest part of Anselmo's penance that he did not know.

In the week following his confession a mission was entrusted to him which removed him from the city for some months. He went as he would have gone into the jaws of hell at a command. He flung himself with a fury of zeal into the work, absorbed himself, submerged himself, would fain have annihilated himself had it been possible; and succeeded so well in the rather delicate matter confided to him that he came out of it a marked man in the eyes of his superiors, and was

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greeted with many whispers of a future reserved for him on earth as well as after.

His task accomplished, he came back; and people marvelled;—the young priest would never be called young again. He had aged by years; his cheeks were thinner, his temples more defined, his eyes deeper set, and new lines had developed about them and his mouth. He had gone away an ardent, eager, impulsive man; he came home silent and self-withdrawn—priest to the last fibre of his being. He had fought out his battle, and there was conquest written in every worn line.

She came no longer to the confessional.

Once only, returning from a visit to a sick parishioner, Anselmo's path led him by the villa. The windows were shut, cobwebs hung over the panes, a dreary air of neglect proclaimed aban-

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donment. There lay the garden deserted, and long sprays of the rose-bush trailed across the path. The priest bent his broad hat closer above his eyes and hastened his steps.

Then began for Father Anselmo that life which is still remembered, which has acquired almost a legendary flavor in Rome. While he still walked in the flesh among them, he became a priest apart, a name distinct from other priests. Ceaseless were his services to God and man; not one duty however terrible, not one task however loathsome, from which he swerved or shrank. He led a consecrated life, in the strictest sense. The hours of the day were as the beads of a rosary of good deeds. He was known as a saint, revered as a saint, adored as a saint, and feared as no saint should be. For with a perfect abnegation of self and devotion to the souls about him, he

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combined an austere indifference to their bodies. So that a soul was saved, the body might perish by the process of salvation. He could indeed nurse the sick with the tenderness of a woman; the infirm and suffering knew him for a saviour; to the murderer, the thief, the soul so steeped in guilt that it had become one huge Guilt, he could say, with the voice which rang conviction as a bell rings music, "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be whiter than snow!"

But for the simple human weaknesses of the heart, its passionate longings, its misguided desires, its outcrying needs, its perpetual struggles and frequent falls—for these the pitying angel became the severe judge.

It is a strange thing, but true: by suffering and sin the soul often allies itself to all souls, while by suffering and conquest it too often allies itself

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to nothing but the Lucifer angel of pride and bitter hardness. We have held our hands in the fire without shrinking; shall these murmur? The eye that offended, we have plucked out; shall these do less?

So it was with Anselmo; and having this unsparing judgment for the weaknesses of the human heart, for its pleasures he had little sympathy. Sacrifices to the flesh, indulgences of the body, he looked but coldly on. Therefore the young, the gay, happy lovers, the newly married, and those whose hearts were hungry or outworn with the fitful desires of youth, held aloof from him. He might be a great saint, but Madonna and the pictured saints were nearer than he.

He might have become an eminent son of the Church, this tall priest with the worn, exalted face and eyes that pierced men's souls, but every prefer-

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ment he put from him. He remained to the last only Father Anselmo; if it should be "Saint" some day, that was God's work, not man's. His exterior life was such as we have said; of his interior life no one knew anything. What fasts and vigils were his, what prayers, what hopes, whether there yet remained a spark of the early fire shut in that silent breast, none could say. His life was the life of a devotee; his face the face of a monk of the early ages.

A year after he had parted from her he saw her again. He went up the steps of a house in the old quarter of Rome. Suddenly something drew his gaze upwards; he looked, and beheld her standing at the top.

In her black gown she seemed thinner, older, fairer, and her eyes were already upon him; those calm eyes and his own deep, sombre ones encountered

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a moment in silence. There are as many kinds of silence as of speech.

With an inscrutable little smile she moved down, near, beside him, past. Anselmo did not turn his head to glance after her, but went on up the stairs into the house.

Then she was not a nun.

IV

There was a stuffy smell; the hot air coming from without was scarcely more refreshing than the hot air within the room, and the child on the pillow moved restlessly.

Father Anselmo came forward quickly at the sound. He looked anxiously at his companion, who, on the other side of the bed, stirred with a large fan the air about the child's head.

"The heat grows insufferable," said the priest.

The woman smiled, a sweet, light smile, and fanned on in silence. Then, laying the fan down, she rose and slipped away into the adjoining room. As if accustomed to substitute itself

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thus, Anselmo's hand took up the task of fanning, while a shadow of thoughtfulness deepened on his face.

By how many sick-beds had this little scene repeated itself in the years past! As easily and naturally as the months of those years had rolled into each other, the little chain of meetings, crossings, occasions, opportunities had grown to this. At first they met frequently, as on that first day, on intercepting errands of good will and charity. Then by some sick-bed they found themselves side by side; in dark rooms where poverty cringed or shame cowered, they grew accustomed each to encounter the other. Finally, when the typhus broke out and raged through the poorer quarters, when all who could flee had fled, when the heat and fever alone divided possession of the stricken city, when the priests, physicians, and nurses who stayed were

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taxed to the utmost, and sinister black processions were met in the deserted streets at all hours, carrying the dead to hasty burial—in that hour of stress and universal suffering the two stood shoulder to shoulder against the common misery.

Without a word the long-defended barriers fell away; the two so long divided were drawn close in bonds of common service. After the very first the priest did not even say, "You should not be here; there is danger," nor the woman, "Save yourself a little, I beg you!" Each silently accepted the other's right without questioning. In all but dress she was a Sister of Mercy; even in robe he was a priest of God.

Now and then, as he caught a vision of that face bent above some sufferer, or found her ready hands waiting to supplement his, a voiceless word of

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thanksgiving rose in his heart: "Merciful God, I thank thee that I wronged not this angel of thine!"

The child moved again, and Anselmo bent and brushed the hair from the warm forehead. The little invalid seized a finger of that comforting hand and clung to it.

"What is it, Luciano?" asked the Father.

The boy did not reply, but fixing his smiling blue eyes on the priest's face, he laid his cheek caressingly on the imprisoned hand, and the two remained so silently.

We have said that the young did not love Father Anselmo. Luciano was the exception proving the rule. Why he should have been so no one knows; but since the day that Anselmo had taken him from the arms of his sick mother and laid him in the arms of the young Sister of Mercy, Luciano

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had shared his heart between them. His mother, one of the last victims of the fever, lay in the next room, slowly regaining her strength. Luciano, too, had been very sick with a slow, obstinate sickness, probably grown from the same seeds of want and hunger.

Together his self-appointed nurses had cherished him back to life, and—again none knows why—above that small bed a closer tie had spun itself than in all the other ministrations. The child was become inexpressibly dear to them. He was in some sort a child vouchsafed to their childless hearts, as if heaven, in recognition of their filial obedience, had willed that a child should be given them to love, without the sin of his creation being laid to their account.

To Anselmo, especially, this little being who did not shrink from his austerity, but stretched arms and

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smiled with delight at his approach, was as a sunbeam from God. The nestling of that soft, curly head against his priest's *soutane* awoke ever fresh accesses of tenderness, and when at some new grace of childhood, some fantastic but charming caprice, the priest's eyes would turn to meet the sympathetic, merry glance of the Sister, a sweet content filled and overfilled his being. Once he actually laughed aloud. He was not himself conscious of the strangeness of that resurrection laugh; but the Sister turned at the sound with startled eyes, and turned them away again tear-filled. Father Anselmo, bent above Luciano and still smiling, saw nothing.

The fever was nearly gone. It left many desolate homes, many weak, pale victims, and those who had stepped between it and its prey so worn and reduced that it might hope to reap an

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aftermath of martyrs; but it left some hearts re-created, some spirits cleansed as by fire, and, not least of its mercies, it left Luciano. Probably that one small, large-eyed child of the people seemed a prey not worth stooping for. It left also his two nurses. The Sister's eyes had taken a violet shadow, and her face was like a Parian vase to hold them; while Father Anselmo, with incessant watching and nursing and his habitual neglect of his own welfare, was in truth a walking shadow. He was conscious at times of a great weariness, but of the body only. His spirit waxed young as the body wasted — again, who knows why? And on this August morning, kneeling beside Luciano, in spite of his cramped limbs and a sleepless night, he was resting perfectly.

Presently the Sister came back from the inner room.

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"She is sleeping," she said, in reply to the priest's questioning glance.

Anselmo rose from his knees and laid down the fan.

"I will go then; I have so many to visit. I will call again before night."

The Sister nodded assent. "I will stay," she said.

Anselmo passed his hand lightly over the boy's curls. "Good by, Luciano."

Luciano, ill-content at the departure of his bond-slave, pouted. The Sister, smiling, bent over him, coaxing him to speak.

How many times had the little scene been enacted before! Why, just to-day, did it happen that the muslin kerchief worn Quaker-wise about the Sister's slender throat was loosened a little, so that Luciano's mischievous eyes should catch a gleam of gold and

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his unmannerly hands make a swift grab at it.

The Sister made a desperate attempt to stop him. As soon hope to catch stray lightning! With a crow of impish glee he had already dragged his prize forth, a long rosary of carved wood and golden beads; it lay upon her bosom, and the Sister's face grew very white.

Father Anselmo, on the other hand, stood transfixed. He heard the night-ingles, he breathed the rose-scent, and beheld a glimmer of moonlight dancing on those beads as—how many years ago?

There was an utter silence. The Sister's eyes were bent upon the floor, Anselmo's on the rosary, and Luciano, glancing from one face to another, affrightedly began to cry. At the sound Father Anselmo started. He laid a soothing hand on Luciano's

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head, and looked gravely across at the Sister. Then he bent his tall head humbly.

“I thank you, my Sister,” said he.
The Sister said nothing.

V

Father Anselmo walked along the narrow streets. The heat was excessive, and his limbs dragged wearily, but he was tasting one of those moments of supreme exaltation when the spirit seems already to have escaped the still-imprisoning body.

How good was God! how infinite His mercies! How He had crowned with loving kindness that cup which he, Anselmo, shrinking at sight of its exceeding bitterness, had prayed might pass from him! Instead he had drained its utmost dregs, and behold it turned to sweetness in his mouth! How rich the reward of obedience to the divine will! In all his once lawless and rebellious heart now was nothing

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but peace and ineffable joy—the joy of the spirit subject to God. Among the other countless benedictions of his life it was given him to live in pure communion, as of spirit with spirit, with that soul once imperiled by his sin, and to know that no shadow of that sin had found abiding-place in that soul dearer to him than his own. Out of his evil she had wrought good, and to-day he had seen the sacred symbol his impious hand had once dishonored, by her restored to be an instrument of her own salvation—perhaps of his, for he could not doubt his name mingled with her prayers, as he had mingled hers with his.

Who knew if it were not the hand of an angel which had guided Luciano's, that the sight might be vouchsafed him as a sign of pardon after all these years?

How good was God! How simple

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the path of peace! And for the obtaining of this peace nothing was demanded of man but to do right. How low the price, how cheap the purchase of supreme joy!

At that moment Father Anselmo felt an impatience with all the blind world of souls about him, who would not, as he had done, suffer and submit for one bitter moment, to find, as he had done, a tenfold reward the next. It was not only wicked, but stupid.

On the threshold of his dwelling once more Anselmo stopped and uplifted a glance of humblest praise.

"I thank Thee, O God, that I did not wrong her!"

Then he entered his narrow monk-like study, and on the threshold a tearful woman met him.

"Would the Father speak to her Giuseppe? She had spoken and spoken! Would the Father make him

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hear reason? Everybody knew the Father's words were gold. She had brought Giuseppe, and a task she had of it! Now would the Father speak to him? The saints alone knew what possessed him, but the Father, who was half a saint, might find out."

Handsome, sullen Giuseppe, with the look of an animal expecting attack, stood turning his hat in his hands. The Father's face grew stern. He was familiar with the romance. Giuseppe loved the pretty blue-eyed Caterina, Baldo's daughter, and the blue-eyed Caterina loved him also; but then she was already assigned to the young milkman, a personage of much greater standing in the world than poor, handsome Giuseppe. What was the daughter's duty? Obviously, to submit herself to her father's will, and keep her plighted troth—not disobediently to lend ear to the voice of the tempter,

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Giuseppe. Again and again the priest had lent his influence to bring these lovers to reason, and now his brow darkened.

"Still disobedient, my son!" said he. "I thought we had heard the last of this. You promised me."

Giuseppe's cheeks flushed. "Father, I did try. I know I promised, but I might as well have promised not to breathe or eat. The very next time I saw her I walked straight by; I made as if I didn't see her, and she no farther from me than you are! Straight by I walked, without a turn of the head or a *buon' giorno*, for, you see, I knew if I once looked it would be as if I had not promised. Straight by did I walk, and then, being past, I glanced—just glanced once, Father—and—it was all of no use! Nobody could have helped it. You would have done the same, Father."

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At this impiety his weeping parent uttered a horror-stricken cry. Father Anselmo stopped her with a gesture.

"Go on," he said to the defiant but confused Giuseppe.

Giuseppe looked a trifle abashed.

"There is no more," he said, "except that we can't help loving each other, and I don't believe the good God intends us to help it. And I have made up my mind. 'Tonio shall not marry her; I will marry her myself.'"

"There, your Reverence; that's how he goes on night and day! Saints above! was ever such wickedness!"

Father Anselmo paid no attention to this outburst of the mother. He spoke to the youth commandingly.

"My son!"

Giuseppe looked up, apprehensive but dogged. Even he was struck with the beauty of the Father's face, the light of his deep eyes.

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"You are young," said Anselmo, "and it is hard for youth to submit itself. I have told you that it is your duty to give up this maiden, and my words have failed. But heaven is gracious. I will speak to you now in other ways." He raised his delicate, wan hand with a gesture which commanded attention. "Give her up for your happiness and hers! Give her up, and the joys you renounce shall be given you tenfold. It is hard for you to believe this, but I tell you it is very truth. Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, heart of man hath not imagined the happiness God sends to the soul that obeys Him. He shall taste the bliss of paradise in the flesh and enter heaven before he dies."

Swept away by the strength of feelings which had gathered all day long, Father Anselmo had spoken, after the first words, to himself and to unseen

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presences. He forgot the two beside him; he was himself translated in the ecstasy he described. His two simple hearers were awed and vaguely impressed, less by his words than by a mood to them incomprehensible and appertaining to that saintship they ascribed to him. But Giuseppe recovered his native shrewdness first.

“Reverendo,” said he, “that may be true for a saint, but not for a man. And even if it were, see you, I don’t want to be happy without Caterina. I’d rather have just a very little happiness right here now with her, that I’m sure of, than a great deal of happiness by and by without her. I can wait for heaven, but for Caterina I can’t wait. And, then, heaven—it’s so uncertain! At the very last minute, perhaps, you do a little sin, or go off—*paфф!*—without the sacrament, and all your trouble lost!”

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"Holy Madonna!" shrieked the horrified mother, crossing herself a dozen times. "Your soul! think of your soul, Giuseppe!"

Father Anselmo's face had grown white, and he pressed his clasped hands tightly to his breast, but he said nothing.

Emboldened by this silence, and led by a firm confidence in the sound good sense of his argument to hope he had convinced the Father, Giuseppe ventured a bold stroke:

"Father," said he, coming forward earnestly, "if you would help us a little, there need be no sin at all. If you would say just a word to her father—he hasn't forgotten, it's only two months since you nursed him through the fever. What you say, that will he do. If you would ask him to give Caterina to me instead of to that good-for-nothing 'Tonio—oh, Reverendo,

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there is nothing we wouldn't do for you! Every time I looked at Caterina I should think, 'It's all Father Anselmo's doing.' And if you liked, we would vow a *bambino* to the Church, or perhaps a *bambina*, because girls—there's not so much they can do! Holy Mother!"

Giuseppe shot suddenly to the other end of the room, cowering and trembling. Quivering with wrath, Anselmo towered above him. For a moment he was unable to speak.

"Disobedient and rebellious!" he thundered at last. "Blind, foolish, wicked boy that you are!" He hurled the phrases at Giuseppe's head. "I have laboured with you enough. Now I command you not to look upon this woman again. If I am disobeyed, I shall know what means to take with you. You ask *me* to help you to your sinful desire! Are you the only man

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in the world who must have the thing he wants? Why should you not suffer as well as others? Are promises to be broken, parents to be set at naught, the Church defied, all that your vile lusts of the flesh may be gratified!"

He laid one hand on Giuseppe's shoulder, flung open the door with the other, and pointed:

"Go," he commanded, sternly, "to the church, and pray there an hour on your knees that God may pardon you. Then, and not till then, will I talk to you."

Obedying the force of that compelling will as if it had been a hand, Giuseppe fled into the air.

Father Anselmo, turning back with still flashing eyes and his tall form drawn to its full height, encountered the figure of the poor mother, apparently rooted to the floor, which she was watering with her tears. The

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priest paused in front of her, and his gaze softened.

"Go," said he, kindly, "and pray with him. Intercede with the Madonna for your son. She was a mother herself—a mother's prayers may move her."

Weeping, but already half-consoled, the woman obeyed silently.

Left to himself, the terrible excitement which had animated Father Anselmo ceased; the tension seemed all at once to fail, and a great, trembling weakness succeeded. He dragged himself across the room and threw himself before the wooden crucifix, which his hands embraced. He laid his head upon the base of the cross. "Father!" he prayed, "give him strength as thou gavest me. Kill all the vile desires of the body! Give me this soul to save, Father!"

VI

It was hours later that the priest again climbed the many steps to the rooms of Luciano and his mother, and knocked at the door on the landing. It was opened to him by the doctor, the man who had worked side by side with Anselmo, healing bodies while the priest fortified souls. The doctor's face brightened at sight of Father Anselmo, whom he could never be induced to regard as anything but a charming man, just as "the Sister" was to him an adorable woman. He it was who had given her merrily that title, "La Suora."

"Come in," he said, "and see a pretty sight, and see, also, whether you can assist me to bring La Suora to reason. That girl hasn't a particle

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of discretion; we shall have her on our hands next."

"She is in better hands than ours," answered Father Anselmo. "She will be kept in strength."

"I hope you're right," returned the doctor, bluntly, "but I shall venture to prescribe a tonic, anyhow. As for you"—he stared at Anselmo—"is suicide your motive?"

"Heaven forbid!"

"Heaven does, but man pays no attention. Look here!" He frankly touched the cloth of the priest's sleeve. "I know I don't treat this with all the respect I might, but if you could look into my irreligious heart, you would find excuses. I don't expect to go to heaven myself, but you are safe enough to get there in your time; why make it *before* your time?"

"Our times are in His hand, my friend, and before the hour none will

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enter heaven," was the priest's only answer.

The doctor opened the door wide. "Pass!" said he, with a comical little sigh.

The priest entered and stopped. It was, as the doctor had said, a pretty sight which met his eye. La Suora, seated in a low chair, held Luciano in her arms. The curly head had fallen backwards against her shoulder, and she clasped him with that clasp of mothers which instinctively moulds the arms of all tender women when a child is laid in them.

The annoyances and troubles which buzzed in the priest's brain began to hum softly, then to settle themselves one by one, then to sleep as insects drowse at certain hours and leave the silence peaceful. He went and stood beside the Sister, looking down at the sleeping child.

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"He is much better, is he not? How well he sleeps." And now the priest's voice was softened and calm.

"He is much better," answered the Sister. She herself looked unusually pale.

Anselmo hesitated a moment. "I will go and sit awhile with the mother," he said.

The Sister rose hastily but carefully, not to disturb the child. "I will tell her," she said, a little hurriedly. "Luciano will sleep now." She laid him gently on the bed, and then went out.

Father Anselmo leaned against the window and looked into the distance. The buzzing had ceased entirely; there was nothing now but a sweet wholesome tranquillity within and without. He bathed his spirit in it; he refreshed himself with deep draughts of it; he felt again that God is good.

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Something touched his hand.

"Father Anselmo!"

He looked down. The Sister was standing beside him, and she held something out to him.

"This is yours."

Anselmo looked at the little brown and gold heap in her hand, and then he glanced at the Sister's face, which was paler than it need have been. A mournful smile played about her lips.

"Take it," she said.

"No, no," he murmured; "it is no longer mine, but yours. Keep it, I beseech you."

The Sister shook her head slightly. "I cannot—you do not understand."

There was a moment's silence, and the Sister's eyes fell.

"You think," she said, "that I keep it as a sacred relic, but it is not true—in that way."

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Anselmo felt a strange, sharp foreboding.

"What—what then?" he stammered.

The Sister's eyes looked straight into his.

"I kept it because of—that night. I have worn it ever since." She turned her head away a moment, and then turned it resolutely back. "Take it," she said, putting it into the priest's passive hand. "You see I cannot keep it *now*." She moved to go.

"Wait!" said the priest, hoarsely. He leaned against the window; the rosary dropped unheeded from his hand; his gaunt eyes fastened themselves upon the Sister's face. He was groping blindly in the darkness of this abyss into which he had been thrust. Little by little the sight habituated itself; the pupils of his eyes dilated;

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he saw. And what he saw froze his blood with horror.

"I have never been a priest in your sight!"

A flash of absolute triumph answered him in the Sister's eyes.

"Never!" she said.

Anselmo grew white as death.

"My sin! my sin!" he groaned, covering his face with his hands. There was a silence—the space of a lifetime—before he spoke again.

"You have told this to your confessor?"

"I have no confessor."

"No confessor!"

She looked at him. "Do you think I could have?"

And the priest felt his cheeks burn with shame. But in another moment the old horror swept in again.

"It has been my sin—all mine!" he exclaimed. "I have driven you from

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the Church, from God. I have made you an unbeliever—my God! who knows, perhaps an atheist!”

“Oh!” exclaimed the Sister, as if involuntarily to herself, “an atheist! I—after that!”

And Father Anselmo staggered and clasped his hands to his burning head. “My God!” he murmured, “aid me! for I do not understand.”

The Sister looked at him with a great, an ineffable tenderness. “No,” she said, “you do not understand; how should you? But I, young as I was, I understood. I was a woman.”

“And yet,” said Anselmo, hoarsely, “she wished to be a nun!” He turned his haggard eyes upon her. “I wrote—I wrote.”

“You wrote,” she assented, quietly; “I had your note.”

His eyes expressed an anguished

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inquiry, which she answered compassionately.

"The vocation had fled. Even the good Father was convinced of that—no matter how." For the first time the shadow of a smile flitted into her eyes and out. "I had other work to do," she added.

The priest did not speak. He was not even looking at her. He was living over in his own mind the course of the past years, every incident of which found a tongue to speak eloquently with, and all said one thing. They shrieked it to him and forced it at last in audible words through his shuddering lips.

"Not one moment of it has been done to God! You did it all for me!"

Even as the words left him he was conscious of a sudden surge of feeling, of—merciful God! *what*, within?

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Through it and above it he heard her voice, softly:

“There was no other way. I never harmed you, and it has made you so much happier.”

Happier! happier! It had made him so much happier! Yes, had it not? And all that peace, all that communion with God, that calm of heart, that happiness, this was what it meant! *This was what it meant!* In a lightning flash he saw the truth in all its length and breadth; he traced every joy, every fresh height of peace, every emotion of tender serenity to its source, and they all sprang from one thing. He had been happier because she was there; because the thing he had conquered had never been really conquered; the thing he had renounced had never been really renounced. He had dwelt in a danger whose very presence she had been able to conceal

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from him by loving arts. And what he took for the peace arising from the love of God had been but the comfort born of the love of woman.

And to compass this she had given her youth, her strength, her years, her life. What a woman's trick! oh, what a woman's trick! In her eyes he had never been a priest at all, but the lover whose warm lips had lain on hers. When she raised those calm eyes to his she had never seen the grave, saddened, consecrated man of God, but only that other man, loving and needy, weak and strong by turns, not a superior being, but a suffering soul, to be cherished with that unspeakable devotion of womanhood. He had been loved as men are loved by women—he, the priest. And in return what had he felt for her—he, the priest? Ah, what indeed!

Then all this time that he had been

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preaching, fighting, fulminating against this sin in others he had been drawing his life's sustenance from such a sin. He had been like one at famine-time, who from the steps of his house preaches resignation, patience, submission, to a starving crowd, and then going into his own banquet-hall, sits and feasts at a well-spread table. Oh, what sin—what loathsome sin! And yet—a sin?

Without daring to look again at the Sister, who was kneeling now beside the child, he turned and went into the next room, where the sick woman lay. He stood beside her bed and stared at her.

"You are better, are you not?" he asked, mechanically. He did not hear her answer.

She had done this—she had done this; and it was, it ought to be, a deadly sin, a sin unpardonable in the

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eyes of God! He took the sick woman's hand in his.

"The fever has left you; soon you will be able to go out a little on each bright day. You have been restored to life. God is good to you, my daughter."

Good, but just. And it is the work of a good and just God to put men and women in the world together and forbid them to love each other?

"Your child, too, is restored to you, and God has sent you friends who will help you to make a good man of him. There is much to make you happy, my daughter. Think of all these things, and grow strong to enjoy them."

And if God, who sends a child even to the desolate and poverty-stricken, had willed that men and women should not be childless? if it had been His intention that hearts should be kept tender, souls always young, by associ-

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ation with these tender hearts and youthful souls? if it had been meant that, clinging to these warm little hands, men and women should reach upwards to heights of purity and strength impossible to the solitary, self-centred soul? "And a little child shall lead them." Why not rather a priest?

Father Anselmo began to tremble violently. He had done no wrong, nor she. Who then had wronged them? Who had made them the victims of this frightful, irreparable fraud, this cheat which robbed them of what the angels in heaven could not make up to them in the hereafter?

"Nothing—nothing the matter. I am not quite well to-day. I will come again. May God keep you, my daughter."

He closed the door softly and leaned against it for breath.

There sat the Sister with Luciano in

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her arms. There were little lines in the Sister's face, a sharpening of the outlines; in a little while she would be no longer young—no longer young, but always alone. She clasped this other woman's child passionately in her arms. All at once the priest comprehended the intolerable aching emptiness of those arms through all the years.

She turned her head, and their eyes met. A fly on the window-pane set up an intolerable buzz, and suddenly the Sister laid her face softly in the child's hair.

Presently the door behind her shut gently.

VII

“And when I say a thing, Father Anselmo, it’s as good as done. Ask my wife if it isn’t so,” said Baldo, energetically, a fixed and honest look of resolution on his rosy face. “I’ve given you my word, and I’ll keep to it. Besides, when all is said, I like the lad myself. My wife always did say it was a sin and a shame to part true lovers, but a woman—” He spread out his pudgy hands.

The priest did not smile.

“Baldo,” said he, “the next time listen to your wife; and do not forget that you have promised. Giuseppe is at my house.” He made a gesture of mingled benediction and farewell and turned away.

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Honest little Baldo looked after him a long moment. When he turned round at last he was winking very fast indeed.

"There walks a saint," said he.

And in the falling dusk Father Anselmo was going—where? As a priest should, straight to the Church.

It had been his home so many years; he was going to see if it were still a home. He was going to carry his wounds to the healing spring; to see if in the Church of a thousand miracles there might haply be one miracle for him.

A church presently loomed out of the dusk before him—no matter what its name; every visitor to Rome knows it. He climbed the stairs, pushed aside the leathern curtain, and entered. It was quite empty; only a few pale lamps burned before the altars in the side chapels and the shrines of saints.

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The radiant young archangel slept beneath a curtain.

Anselmo looked from shrine to shrine, from image to image; then he moved quickly forward and prostrated himself before that of the Madonna with her divine Child. He clasped his hands in a gesture which must have told her all, it was so full of woe.

"O most holy and blessed Virgin!" he began, and stopped; it seemed to him that the image no longer smiled, but frowned angrily upon him. And he began again, with renewed passion: "O holy Mother of God," and stopped again.

What could she do for him? He rose to his feet and sent his anguished eyes up and down the church, and on every hand they encountered nothing but the altars of celibate saints, sanctified men and women—monks and nuns, who in their lives of self-repres-

Ashes, Dust, and Nothing

sion, self-denial, self-immolation, self-torture had gloriously won to this. And on the high altar a dead Christ, in whose name all this was done, who came to save souls, and who suffered all things on earth—but one.

Nowhere in that temple raised to the suppression of the human was there a spot so large as the palm of a little child's hand whereon a broken heart might be laid.

The priest looked desperately up to the frescoed dome; there an angry God doomed sinners. He looked down at the stones beneath his feet, and they jeered at him out of the dusk in these letters. He bent to read them:

Hic jacet
Cinis
Pulvis
et
Nihil

Ashes, Dust, and Nothing

"Ashes, Dust, and Nothing!" murmured Anselmo, pressing his hand to his heart. "Ashes, dust, and nothing! nothing! nothing" he repeated, with increasing bitterness; "not even men!"

Then a fierce revulsion shook him.

"Merciful God!" he cried aloud, and prostrated himself upon the stones. Something slipped against his fingers, and they closed over it. The little balls seemed to throb and palpitate with life beneath his touch. He lifted it up—that rosary which seemed to exhale the warmth, fragrance, and balm gathered through years of lying in her bosom. He laid his thin, white cheek against it, and his parched lips caressed the beads.

"Merciful God!" he whispered once more. Alas, the string, grown tender with age and handling, snapped under his tremulous touch, and broke.

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Something else snapped and broke at the same moment.

The beads, scattering and pattering, rolled in all directions over the stones and made a great noise.

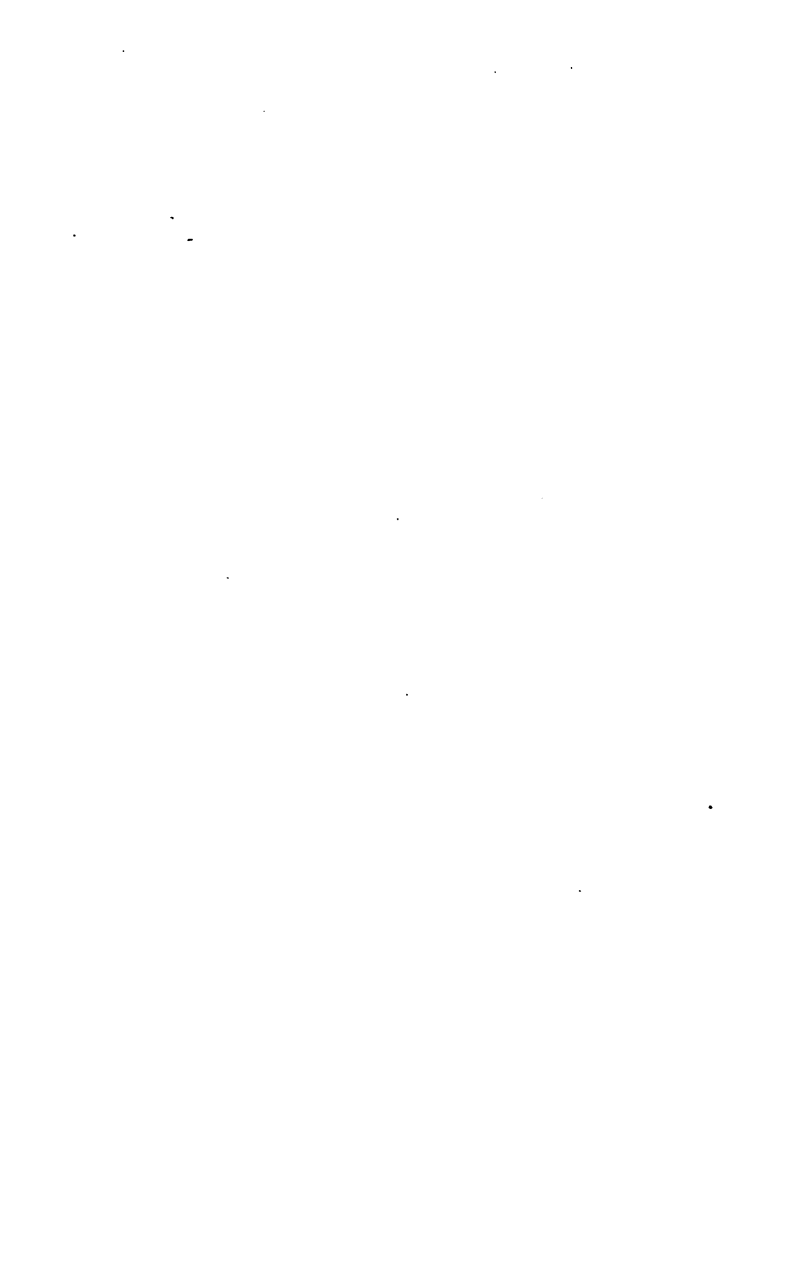
But the other made no noise at all.

They said, touching his wan face reverently, that he had worn himself out with holy ministrations; and touching the thin, white hands which clasped a crucifix and a few beads, that he had died at his prayers. They added, "He is now a saint in heaven."

They might be right about that or not; one thing was certain, he was no longer a priest of God on earth.

But there are more priests of God.

The Feast of Bluebirds



The Feast of Bluebirds

For days the block of yellow cornmeal which Annunziata laid upon the tablecloth had been growing smaller. Finally one evening it was so small that even Andrea looked discouraged, and Gino, resting his head upon his little hand, watched pensively while Annunziata with a string—one end in her mouth and one in her hand—divided it into three slices.

“This is the last,” said Annunziata, abruptly.

Andrea’s face lengthened, and Gino looked apprehensively from his father to his mother.

“*Chè*,” said Andrea, cheerfully, “we can eat *bollite* then.”

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"The chestnuts, too, are gone," answered Annunziata, shortly.

And this time Andrea was silent.

"There will be no more work at the rope-yard till Saturday," he observed at last. "That is two whole days."

Annunziata said nothing, but her husband knew what the red spots in her cheek meant.

This diabolical pride of hers came of her being a "foreigner"—from quite the other side of Lucca, where Andrea went in the hope of bettering himself the year he fell into despair over the cordage rates. He bettered himself certainly, for he brought home Annunziata the next year, and she imported with her these fantastic ideas of hers.

No one else minded being a little poorer in a place where everybody was poor at the best of times, but to Annunziata it was the bitterness of death.

It was not the being hungry, but the

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having it known you were hungry. She would cut the polenta smaller and smaller, and deal out the boiled chestnuts in pairs, days together, so long as no one knew it. Once she had gone, and compelled Andrea to go, a day and a half without food, only Gino having a few scraps of crust. And the only time she ever turned upon her husband was when, on that second day, he hinted—being a man and tender-hearted towards his stomach—that Pietro, next door, would never miss a handful of polenta till the next working day.

“Beg if you will!” flashed Annunziata, “but not a morsel will *I* touch; it would choke me.”

And Andrea did not beg. Instead he hunted *funghi* in the nearby Pineta, and went surreptitiously to the shore for stray shellfish and little fishes, which they swallowed raw, Annunziata

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sternly refusing to make a fire at that hour of night for fear of neighbourly curiosity. As it was, she had an abiding fear that Anna, Pietro's wife, suspected the truth that time, and this haunting terror led her to make great bustle of preparing things on fat days, and to exploit Gino advantageously on thin ones. It promised to be a remarkably thin one now.

"Here is a crust," she said to the child in the morning. "Go and eat it out on the front doorstep."

"Yes, mama," responded Gino, meekly.

"And mind, if Anna asks you, you have had plenty to eat," she added, sharply.

"Yes, mama," assented Gino, obediently again.

"If she sees that," thought Annunziata, "she cannot say we have no food in the house."

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Then she deliberately wasted a handful of fuel, to make a smoke come out of the chimney; what can a smoke mean if not that one is cooking? And still Andrea's hunger remained undiminished; man is but a rude animal at best.

On the second morning he said: "If I were to borrow Ugolino's gun? Perhaps I can kill one of the *uccelli* in the Pineta; they are flying everywhere."

"That is an idea," replied Annunziata, who had no scruples about borrowing a gun, since it was not to eat. She got his hat for him, and watched him depart; then catching sight of Anna advancing across the yard, hastily tumbled some plates into the earthen bowl and began to wash them vigorously.

"Sit down, Anna," she greeted her affably, "while I just finish up these dishes. Oh, if one could live without eating, it would save work!"

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And though Anna had her suspicions, she went home all in doubt, for no one born in the place would have been capable of such duplicity. When she was gone, Annunziata dropped into a chair.

"Another day, and they will all know! Madonna, aid me!"

She picked up a little shaving and began to chew it. Gino would not betray her, she knew; he had been bred in this from babyhood; his little stomach suffered many a pang, but his great heart was stout.

"It has never been so bad as this," thought Annunziata, in despair, as the day wore on, noon came, and no Andrea. "He has found nothing. Saints above! the neighbours will have to know to-morrow." She went to the door, and looked towards the Pineta.

"Good day, 'Nunziata!" called

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Beppe, passing, with his load of nets.
"Are you ill? You look so white."

"*Chè*, nothing," replied Annunziata, sitting down on the step and taking Gino in her lap, who looked pale and listless. He had not found crusts sustaining; besides, there were creases in his stomach.

"How hard your heart beats, *ma-mina*," he said, languidly, leaning his head against it.

Just at that moment Pasquina came by with her baskets of nuts fresh from the Apennines.

"*Chè*, Gino," she called, merrily; "here are some fat ones for thee."

Gino's hand clutched at them, but his mother's restrained him almost fiercely.

"*Piano, piano!*" she said. "Not so greedy! But thanks, Pasquina; in fact, a child never has *bollite* enough." She nodded to Pasquina, who ran on gaily;

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then rising with Gino, she closed the door and tore the shells open.

"Eat, eat, *carino!*" she said, with passion, filling the little hands.

"Thou, too, *mamina,*" said Gino, manfully; but Annunziata shook her head and turned away.

"God in heaven!" she thought, frantically; "if they must all know to-morrow!"

At that instant she beheld Andrea coming quickly up the path; in another, he was in the room.

"Shall we fast to-day, Annunziata?" he cried out, triumphantly. "Look there! and there! and there!" throwing down on the table a little mass of blue feathers—another, and another.

"Three of them!" he said, laughing like a boy, with beaming eyes. "Those little beasts that sing. Was I lucky, eh? And now to get them over the fire."

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He began eagerly to strip the plumage by the handful, but Annunziata interposed.

"Make up the fire, Andreino," she said; "I will do this." And gathering up the three little bodies, she started for the front door. "They make a mess inside here," she explained over her shoulder.

The "little beasts that sing" were songless as her fingers worked rapidly, but the song was in Annunziata's heart.

Anna, in the next dooryard, kept her curiosity till it threatened to be fatal; then she strolled across.

"Just to get a breath of air, 'Nunziata—what a heat! But, altro! I see you are in business."

"A mouthful for dinner," responded Annunziata, carelessly; "some Andrea shot just now out walking."

"And a good shot, too; there is nothing better than those small ones."

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"The little beasts are fat as priests," said Annunziata, deprecatingly; "the sooner they are over the fire the better."

"Some will have it they are better after a day or two."

"Yes, I know; but for my part, I like them fresh, with all the taste in them. Not that I'd like to think so much of my food as some."

"That is true," assented Anna. "Now, there are those two girls who sew with me; one puts everything down her *gola*; if she gets a soldo, down her *gola* it goes. You won't believe me, but I've known her buy an egg for breakfast more than once."

"*Chè!*"

"*Vero*; in place the other is as wise as wise, and puts her soldi in aprons, ribbons—things that do you some good. Well, a *riverderla*, and good appetite."

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Annunziata carried the little bodies in. She speared them with a slender stick, and turned them above the handful of fire. The savoury smell began to fill the kitchen, and Gino sniffed hungrily.

"That was really a good morning's work you did there," said Annunziata to her husband. "And so large they are — and fat!" They might have been turkeys, at least, from her tone.

She spread the tablecloth — that cloth was another of Annunziata's vanities; she had taught Gino to wipe his fingers and lips on it as neatly as she and his father did. To say truth, she had taught Andrea, also, for he was not brought up with tablecloths, and their proper use does not come by nature. To-day she smoothed it carefully, laid a plate, knife, and fork for each, and then placed the dish, with

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three brown, juicy morsels in it, before Andrea, and they all sat down.

There was a moment of rapt contemplation.

"*If* they are fat!" said Andrea, laughing in spite of himself a little exultantly, with the conscious pride of the provider.

"Anna said you must be a *diavolo* of a shot." The eternal feminine artlessly ministered to this.

"*Chè, chè,*" returned Andrea modestly, but elated; "they flew just before my eyes." He took up his knife and fork. "What shall I give you, Annunziata?"

"Oh, a bit of a wing or leg."

"It is all good, even its little head," said Andrea, carving carefully.

Then there was only the sound of teeth upon bones, and an occasional sigh of rapture from Gino—broken by a knock at the door. It was Anna's

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Elisabetta, who came in with something on a plate.

"*Mia madre* was roasting bread, and she says roasted bread is good with *uccellini*," said the child, covetously eyeing the feast.

Annunziata smiled hospitably. "Come in, Elisabetta; we are just eating a bite. Tell your mama so many thanks, and here"—she swept the bread from the plate and piled the remaining chestnuts on it—"eat these, *chè*; we have eaten all we can."

"She can say that she saw the whole three on the plate," Annunziata thought, proudly; "and that bread is no charity, for Anna herself saw the *uccellini* with her own eyes."

"What Anna says is true," she added aloud; "roasted bread is good with these beasts."

There was another interval of eating; then Andrea, whose plate was

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cleared, looked wistfully at the platter.

"What do you say, 'Nunziata,'" he faltered, "another little bit? It seems that these make one more hungry to eat them."

"I say, *cut it*," replied Annunziata, recklessly. "I'm not one to stuff; no one can say it—but now and again a good meal—"

"I have heard them say at the *trattoria* that the *forestieri*—the Americans and English—think nothing of eating them whole." He was carving the second skillfully as he said it.

"Some of them would eat an ox, I believe," replied Annunziata.

There was another eloquent interval; then Annunziata sat back and contemplated the table.

"A whole one and a half, and there is a whole one and a half still advances itself, and we are all as full as pigs."

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"Yes," said Andrea; "a good meat dinner does make one feel better." He pushed back his chair.

"Somehow," he remarked a few hours later, "I can taste those small ones yet, and for my part I shan't be sorry to have some more for supper."

Annunziata only laughed.

"It is not every one who eats meat twice a day, but for this once—I must say they did taste well," she admitted.

"Are you still eating the *uccellini*?" asked Anna, gaily, looking in an hour later.

"*Chè!*" Annunziata deprecated; "one should eat them fresh. Sit down and taste them with us, Anna."

"No, *grazie*; I have my own supper to cook; only polenta, but what would you—with eight to feed—"

"You have reason there, Anna," responded Annunziata, sympathetically. "We are only three, but you

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may believe me, we do not eat meat twice every day—no, nor even once. Thanks for the roasted bread.”

“Altro—a nothing-at-all! You sent back more than came; all those *bollite*.”

“You shouldn’t speak of them—a centesimo’s worth.”

“And there still advances itself *half* an one,” murmured Annunziata to herself with satisfaction, as she cleared the table later. The smile lingered on her lip as she sat mending Andrea’s coat that night, while he and Gino slept. She was the first one up in the morning, and when Andrea sat down to his early breakfast before going back to work, she set before him a plate with the last morsel of the *uccelli* on it.

“Annunziata!” he stammered, protestingly.

Actually she gave his head a hasty caress.

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"Eat it, eat it; there is still a crust for Gino, and to-night you will have half a franc. Altro!" she laughed gaily, "I don't say one should live like this every day, but for once:—you will work like an ox after that."

Andrea ate it every bit, and rose with a sigh of satisfaction.

"It does give you strength—meat," he admitted.

Annunziata cleared away the empty plate gaily.

"Three good meals," she said to herself. "And they may say what they like, but not many in the village can say they have eaten meat three meals together. Is that you, Anna? I was just clearing away the last of those *uccellini*. It did seem we should never get them eaten up!"

The Uccelli with Golden Voices

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Beppino was small and thin; Tommaso was robust and plump. Bep-pino's big eyes made his pale face look paler, while Tommaso's red cheeks and lips and sparkling black eyes made his whole face bright as you looked at it.

There was no good reason for this difference, because they lived in the same 'squalid house, slept in the same bed, ate the same miserable food, had the same rough father, and—alas! had lost the same excellent mother only a few weeks before these things happened. The same little Mediterranean fishing village gave them birth, with the same sun to warm them and the same sweet salt air to breathe—but there it was!

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Any one who looked at Tommaso's sturdy frame could see easily where the big voice, which was the pride of the village, lodged itself; but it was not so easy to see where Beppino tucked away his sweet alto—the voice only second to Tommaso's, and which supported his so satisfyingly. They were the song-birds of the place, where every one sang more or less.

"He has a bird in his throat," they said of Tommaso.

"Take care of that voice, my boy," said a tourist, bestowing a two-cent piece, "for, with training, you will be a real singing-bird; but if you strain it shouting at nights in all this damp, your bird will lose its song."

"Oh, signore, we are habituated to it; it makes nothing when one is habituated," Tommaso gaily replied, showing his white teeth in his good, frank smile. A thoroughly lovable

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boy was he, healthy and human. The lips which a moment before had sung like the angels, closed upon an apple with equal zest the next. With his eyes raised, his glorious tones pouring out, you would swear he was thinking of the celestial choirs. Nothing of the kind; only of making good sounds at that moment, and of the hot *polenta* one could buy with the copper he would probably receive the next. Beppino, at his side, trembled with pleasure that was pain in its intensity. When Tommaso, his red cheeks purple, his mouth open wide to let the great tones out, sang, "*Non ti scordar di me! Non ti scordar di me!*" Beppino would have thrown himself down at his brother's feet if it would have served him in anything. And when Tommaso softened that volume of music to sing, caressingly, "*Bella sei com' un' angela,*" something in Beppe grew too big for

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his body, and expanded through his parted lips in the purest alto notes—rich, sustaining, aspiring. Tommaso's voice grew twice as beautiful again.

"There are our *uccelli*," said the village folk, indulgently. Especially since the mother's death the village heart beat kindly to them. No one thought it a pity they should sing out of doors at night, for every one was "habituated" to such things, and that singing could possibly hurt a voice made to sing with would have seemed to these simple souls incomprehensible. God gives you things to use.

So the boys sang on, for fun or for bread, just as it happened, equally well either way. After the mother died they sang oftener for bread.

"If you are hungry, go and earn," the father was apt to say roughly. And presently their voices, singing to the despair of imitators, would be

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heard through the evening, and up flew casements, open came doors; there was never any lack of an audience. With good luck they sometimes gathered in three or four cents apiece in showers of centesimi, even when tourists were not many.

Tommaso was always the trump card; he sang the solos.

"He will sing in the opera, that boy," "He has a fortune in his throat," said many and many an one. Tommaso laughed frankly at the praise. It was Beppino who shivered with a stronger excitement as he heard. At nights, lying awake while Tommaso slept, he saw it all: the great house with its thousands of lights, Tommaso on the stage singing "*Non ti scordar di me!*" and the king and queen applauding. No wonder his brother did not seem to him like other boys, but a superior being.

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Meanwhile, the bald present prefigured badly enough that golden future. It was always, "Go and earn, if you want to eat," nowadays, and the audiences which listened with the same delight every night were by no means so ready to give coppers nightly.

"See," said one, sympathetically, "if you want soldi, there is an American signore there in that house who loves music. Some say he is a singer himself, a pupil of the great maestro in Florence. Go sing there!"

The American signore, who was here resting his own voice, sat unsuspectingly poring over the "Theory of Music" the next evening. Suddenly his head went up like a war-charger's who hears the trumpet.

"Non ti scordar di me! non ti scordar di me!" a voice of incredible power and passion sang beneath his window.

The signore made a single step, and

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with a single wrench flung open the casement. He could see nothing but a dark spot in the darkness, but the air from "Trovatore" rolled up to him majestically. Then, after a minute's silence:

"*Bella! bella sei com' un' angela!*" floated up, and beneath flowed a second melting voice in alto.

The signore stepped to his bell-rope and pulled it sharply.

"Send those singers up here," he ordered, and meantime he emptied his too thin pocketbook of coppers.

"*Benissimol!*" laughed Tommaso, when the order was transmitted. "There will be *polenta* to-night—perhaps apples."

Two boys, ragged, flushed, smiling, and breathless—for the stairs to the American's room were many and steep—entered, caps in hand, Tommaso ahead, as befitted the star.

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"But it is impossible you boys can sing like that!" said the signore, sharply.

The boys grinned sheepishly and looked at each other helplessly, after the manner of boys. Tommaso, however, plucked up courage to say:

"Oh, yes, signore, it was we who sang. If the signore wishes, we will sing again here."

"Very well," responded the signore, taking a chair on the opposite side of the room.

The boys exchanged a few words, twirled their caps a little, and suddenly Tommaso opened his mouth, and the walls of the room rang.

"Non ti scordar di me! non ti scordar di me!"

Tommaso was purple in the face; it seemed that he would burst his small body, and there he stood, precisely like a Lucca della Robbia boy in the

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marble singing frieze. Beppino, beside him, hung upon his notes, moving his own lips in unison, once or twice wincing a little when the great voice grew greater; then all at once, without warning, his alto took up the strain, fearlessly supporting. The signore listened, shading his face with his hand.

"Three years," he thought, "have I wasted trying to learn, and there they stand—artists!"

When they had finished he emptied the coppers into Tommaso's hand.

"That will do," he said, brusquely. But Beppino had seen his eyes.

"He is a pupil of the maestro in Florence," said the padrona as she let them out. "Ah, if Tommasino could get a year's lessons from that one!"

The next morning the signore was surprised to receive a visit from a thin, white-faced boy, in whom he scarcely

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recognised a Della Robbia by daylight. Beppino was almost frightened to death at his own temerity; his tongue stammered painfully, but he managed at last to get out his errand.

"I understand. Tommaso is your brother; he has the great voice, and you are the alto. Yes, and you want me to take him to Florence to the maestro to be made a great singer?"

"If the signore pleases," responded Beppe, trembling all over.

"*Altro!*" said the signore. "All that takes money, and I am poor. Besides, Tommaso would have to learn a hundred things, and study many years."

"But he sings so beautifully, signore," pleaded the boy. "And every one says there is gold in his throat."

"Without doubt there is gold, but it must be mined. Is there nobody in this town to help you, that you come to a *forestiere?*"

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"Oh, signore, no one!" said Beppe, mournfully. "We are all so poor. And if Tommaso sings much more, he will spoil his beautiful voice. Cannot you hear, even now, sometimes, a little note or two?"

"Is this all you have to say?" demanded the signore, roughly.

"All, signore," answered Beppino, crestfallen.

"Well, then, good morning."

He called down the stairs after Beppino, who was sadly retracing his steps:

"Tell your Tommaso if he sings in the rain as he did last night, he will soon have neither gold nor coppers in his throat—and not one soldo shall he get here for such foolishness; do you hear?"

"Yes, signore," stammered Beppe, appalled.

He told Tommaso, almost tearfully,

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when the latter proposed making a few centesimi that night.

"*Bella sei com' un'angela!*" shouted Tommaso at the top of his lungs for all-scornful reply. As if he were not habituated to the rain! And when Beppino remained firm in his fear of the signore:

"*Ebbene!*" he exclaimed, indignantly; "*I'll* sing then; it is me they want to hear," and with this taunt went forthwith and bellowed—a beautiful bellow, to be sure—under the signore's window.

The signore ground his teeth and swore quietly, and at last flung open the window and hurled a franc-piece at the singer.

"*Alla casa, subito! Sentite!*" he shouted, savagely; and Tommaso, laughing heartily, fled, to consume a whole franc's worth of good things at the nearest *trattoria*."

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Meanwhile Beppino, supperless, was dampening their common bed with tears until it threatened to become as dangerous night-mists.

The signore, his elbows on the table and his forehead on his hands, sat and thought grimly, while the "Theory of Music" lay on the floor. Surely, it was an unnecessarily bitter farce to come so far, to stay so long, to spend so much, only to find out one did not know what the gamins of the sea did?

And then there was Someone at home.

But there was also Music—Music crying out to him continually:

"*Non ti scordar di me!*" "Do not forget me! do not forget me!"

When the boys received an order, a few days later, to attend the signore at once at his house, Beppe was almost afraid to go. Doubtless the signore

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was furious that they had been singing under his window night after night (for how long could Beppino stand out against Tommaso and an empty stomach combined?), where they were invariably received at first with obdurate silence, then with hurled coppers and imprecations.

Tommaso, however, was not afraid—not he. He presented himself debonairly in his rags, cap in hand and smiling, at the door. Beppino, paler and bigger-eyed than ever, shrank behind him.

“Enter,” said the signore, briefly. “There, don’t try to talk till you get your breath; then use it to sing for this gentleman.” He turned and began to speak low and rapidly to some one seated in a capacious chair opposite—a little, gaunt, grey-haired man, with a nervous face and deep eyes.

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Tommaso glanced at him. "It is *some one*," he decided, quickly; "a *personaggio*, perhaps a *conoscento*—one who knows," and he filled his chest. "'Trovatore,' and be ready, you," he murmured to Beppino, who only nodded.

"Suppose it *were* some one?" he, too, had thought; "and, *Madre di Dio!* if he should notice that little something in Tommaso's voice!

"Sing not *too* loud, Tommasino," he entreated, hurriedly.

"*Per Bacco!* as loud as I can," retorted Tommaso. "Do not I know? They shall see—they shall hear!"

Forthwith he began, and never, surely, had he sung so well. The tones, even, full, rich, rang to the ceiling; one felt the walls expand, while with a passion incredible, an art incomprehensible, this child of the street and the sea sang:

The Uccelli with Golden Voices

"Non ti scordar di me! non ti scordar di me!"

Beppino, stepping forward fearlessly in his excitement, with eyes riveted upon his brother, followed every note, breathing with him, wincing once only, involuntarily, and shutting his eyes when Tommaso, purple, open-mouthed but glorious, strained a little too far the high note.

"If only he would not!" thought Beppino; "O kind Mother of God, if only he would not!" Then the great golden tones began dropping again from the full throat, and with a sigh of relief and exultation Beppino opened his own lips and sang, always subordinatedly, yet always bearing up the voice above.

The old man sat impassive, his eyes fastened to the two faces before him, but the signore, who with shaded face had looked upon the ground, turned

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with a brusque motion of his hand across the eyes.

"You see," he said, "and you hear," for there was a loud clapping from the street below, where all the passers-by had paused to hear the song. "Was I right?"

"I see—and I have heard," responded the old man, grimly. "And you were not altogether wrong." He rose deliberately, and crossing the room laid a hand on Beppino's shoulder.

"You I will take with me; I can make an artist of you."

Both boys stood stricken; Tommaso's cheerful jaws fell, and his ruddy cheeks for once were pale; Beppino, paler still, looked dumbly at the maestro, at Tommaso, at the signore.

"Of course it is that one," said the signore. "I congratulate you, maestro, on a pupil who will do you honour.

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There will be no trouble about the family; I have inquired, and I will attend to transferring the funds at once."

"To the devil with your funds!" interrupted the maestro, rudely. "What have I to do with your funds. This boy I take because he has music in him. It is none of your business whatever, and you will attend to your business—that is to say, your studies—strictly. Do you think you are the only person in the world possessing funds?"

"On the contrary," replied the American, bitterly, "I am aware that almost any one possesses more. You take the boy, then? So much the better; I give up my place to the other. Either has ten times more of music in him than I, and it is Music I saved the money for, after all. Take them both with you, maestro; I will be at the charge of this one."

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“Signor Stupido!” stormed the maestro; “will you be quiet! You think—you Americans—that it is only you who can do fine things; you are the vainest people in the world. But be at the trouble to learn otherwise! You came to Florence to study music, and—*per Bacco!*—study music you shall so long as I can teach you anything. As for these two, I take them with me. This other has gold in his voice, as they say, and perhaps may learn something. Are you to teach me how much I shall do for Music—I, who was a musician when you were in your cradle? Besides,” he added, craftily, “I am not doing this for charity—*diavolo*, no! I leave that to fools of Americans. Every soldo—every centesimo—shall these young ones pay back to me some day; and if *I* am dead they shall swear and sign to pay it to some other like them-

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selves, for—*per Bacco!*—God is not going to stop making beautiful voices with these two. As for you—yes, do you hear?—I will make an artist of you, too, signore, whether you will or not. And now an end to these follies. I am going to the house of these two. Come, my children.”

Speechlessly, meekly, the two boys accompanied the old man downstairs and through the wondering throng at the door. Tommaso, however, speedily began to recover his spirits. After all, he did not so much mind Beppino’s triumph, if he was going also to Florence. The maestro had admitted there was gold in his throat, and gold is the real thing in this world. He walked along then cheerfully, swelling indeed with pride and excitement.

But the maestro’s hand rested on Beppino’s shoulder, and from time to time the boy’s shy eyes glanced up

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into the maestro's grim face with a look of wondering worship and confidence. Music was between them already.

As for the signore, left alone, he threw himself on the dingy sofa and cried like a child.

For he, too, loved Music, and so did Somebody at home.



The Bonselli's Daughter

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"*Basso, brutto, povero!*" Gemma said it with a spiteful emphasis meant expressly for her sister's ear, and Gina heard, but disdained to take any notice. Only her head was held a trifle higher, and the nod which Mario received as he passed with a half-timid glance was cooler than even he was accustomed to. For Gina could feel Gemma's malicious eyes through the back of her head. "*Basso, brutto, povero!*" sang Gemma, tauntingly again, dancing off a step to look at herself in the hall mirror. There were few sights in R—— better worth the trouble.

By comparison with her handsome sister, Gina, handsome enough herself, was plain. Handsome women were

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the rule in this sea-nurtured town—Greek statues walking on the strongest and most delicate ankles in the world, making nothing of a child or two in their arms and great baskets of fish or piles of faggots on their stately heads. All these saluted Gina with respect as they passed and repassed the door of the Albergo Europa. Were there but two hotels on the farthestmost peaks of the Apennines, these would be called, respectively, "Hotel di Roma" and "Albergo Europa." Among its ten thousand namesakes, the Albergo Europa, of which Gina's father was proprietor, was doubtless the humblest. Nevertheless, it contained twelve rooms, was three stories high, and towered by two of them above the rest of the town, except for the deserted summer palace of a Bourbon, which lent age and dignity to the principal piazza, and for a modern villa or two,

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ambitiously reared on the sea-front by Tuscan nobility. People were already discreetly forgetting the days when the Albergo had but two stories; as to the time when it had but one, that was forgotten; and only the captious and envious haggled over allowing the titles of "signor" and "signora" to the hard-working Bonselli, who had surely earned them, if any ever did earn titles.

Gina might remember as a child something of the plain days of the family, but Gemma, four years younger, knew them only as displeasing tradition, and held her head as loftily under a feathered hat as any signorina of generations. The Signora Bonselli could never get to feel quite comfortable in a hat herself—so much she was free to confess; but Gemma would insist upon wearing hers and compel her sister to do likewise when-

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ever they sauntered down the long *molo* to watch the crowds of tourists watching, in their turn, the fishing-boats coming in at sunset with the catch. At such times many a glance did the face under Gemma's hat receive from the lounging nobility of several nations; and at least one pair of eyes followed despairingly the face beneath Gina's. How did not that hat accentuate the gulf which separated a mere mariner from the hotel-keeper's daughter!

It was a gulf which frightened Gina herself. One may not be one's beautiful sister, and still possess some sense of the value of one's station in life and the be-hatted privileges it carries with it. In fact, the less one is a beauty the more reason one has to cling jealously to what one has. With a mere kerchief knotted about her head Gemma would still have been the prettiest

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girl in R——; her hat alone differentiated Gina from a hundred.

Mario, however, remembered her without a hat—a rosy-cheeked, tumbled-haired child, with bright curls all atoss about her face, in the days when they shared the brown chestnuts and plucked grapes at the *vendemmia* together. It was not her hat which made her beautiful to him; for this very reason the elders shrugged their shoulders at this possible son-in-law.

“Mario’s wife will never wear a hat,” said her father, with this shrug. “It will be well for her if she has a new kerchief for festas. *Chè*, think better of it, Gina.”

“What would you?” added soft-hearted Signora Bonselli, deprecatingly. “Mario is a good lad, but a good heart alone will not keep you warm. And a mariner! a baby every

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year, that means, and fifteen francs a month—and the sea forever hungry!"

"Give up your hat and wear a kerchief, and be laughed at by every one—all for the sake of that short, homely, poor Mario!" Gemma cried, tauntingly. "You are *pazza*, Gina! Live in one of those little houses back of us, and slave all the months while your husband is away!"

Gemma could never forgive Mario for being the one man who looked continually at Gina as other men looked at herself. Gina had a *contadina* soul, Gemma indignantly asserted; she had no sense of what was due her station, and was always "remembering" things.

"Let her do as she will," said the father; "it is her affair. It is not as if she were our only one; Gemma will not throw herself away." Only they did not economize warnings, as indeed was their right, to their daughter.

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So day after day Gina stood before her mirror, adjusting the hat which Mario's wife could never wear, and was inscrutable even to sharp-eyed Gemma. Sometimes she took it off and contemplated herself without it (when Gemma was not there), but always she ended by putting it on and sallying forth to the *molo*, where Mario's dark eyes beheld in its nodding plumes the daily funeral of his hopes. Between the hat and him it was an absolute choice; as his wife she would be hooted out of town should she attempt to wear it, and Mario's own pride would have forbidden the attempt. Yet what had he to offer in compensation? It only made him the prouder and more insistent that his reason pointed out the gulf between mere love and the solid things of life—such as ostrich-feathers.

Thus when Gemma once more sang

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out, in just tune and time with footsteps, her "*Basso, brutto, povero!*" Mario wheeled suddenly on those quick feet of his and swung impetuously back to the doorway, his brown cheek reddening and his eyes ablaze.

"Choose now!" he exclaimed, while Gina half-shrank, and Gemma, a little frightened, yet smiled with malice. "Small and poor and ugly I may be, as Gemma says, but small and poor and ugly as I am, you must take me or let me go forever."

Gina was frightened for a moment, then angry, for Gemma was laughing maliciously; and after all, was she not the hotel-keeper's daughter?

"You are not my master, to speak so to me," she said, proudly.

Mario looked straight into her eyes. (Oh, if Gemma only had not been there!)

"Either that or nothing."

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"Then it is nothing," flashed Gina, and would have fallen at his feet the next moment.

Mario took off his cap. "*Addio*, then, Signorina Bonselli," he said, bowing very low, with a white face.

Gina said not a word; she stood like stone and watched him go.

"*Ai!*" mocked Gemma, "*Ohime!* I suppose you will put on a long face now, and let even the Adelaide see he has jilted you!"

"I will kill you if you say a word!" replied her sister, with blazing eyes, as she tore by and slammed the door of their common bedroom.

He was there on the *molo*; he brushed against her as he took one end of the rope to draw the boat up the canal, in company with the other men, but he brushed past her without a glance. Thus it had been for a whole week.

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"I shall never be able to bear it," she thought. "Holy Mary! it will kill me if he does that!"

Early the next morning she stole away, while Gemma still slept, and laid the coral heart Mario gave her before the Virgin's shrine.

"Only send him back! I did not mean it!"

Later, Gemma and she walked in the Pineta—the slow Sunday promenade under the tall pines, with the blossoming gorse, all green now, all golden later. Beneath the edges, over a rim of sand, danced the water, one sparkle of blue all the way to purple Spezzia. The sword of an occasional officer glanced in the sunlight prettily, and all the handsomest girls in town strolled chattering and casting envious eyes at obvious lovers. Gemma was soon supplied with a cavalier—she might have had a dozen; and Gina

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walked silently with them, her face indifferent under the big hat, her heart pounding within her holiday dress. The two sisters were gowned in imitation of the summer visitors; only subtle ways of lifting skirts and the like betrayed the counterfeit to the connoisseur. Half-way through the Pineta Gina had sustained the throbbing tension, her eyes fastened upon the bright waters, which she hardly saw, when she felt Gemma give her a covert dig with her elbow, without interrupting by a phrase her badinage.

It was he, and Gina needed no second glance to burn into her brain the face beside him, under its pale oval of hair. They passed without a salutation; indeed, Adelaide's eyes were glued to her companion's and blind else. This girl would never keep him waiting, it was plain to see.

"Basso, brutto, povero!" hissed

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Gemma, and though Mario's eyes never turned their way, Gina saw the red creep slowly up the cheek half hidden from her. The parasol handle snapped in Gina's hand. Gemma gave her sister a curious glance.

By the next day it was in every one's mouth that Mario was to marry the pale Adelaide.

Such a marriage of hunger with thirst was too common to provoke comment, nor were the parties to it conspicuous enough to deserve more than that interest felt in every event in a place so small that nothing is unimportant. The real zest was given to the situation by the relation of a third—the Bonselli's daughter. Every one wished to see how she looked, and the girl was too proud to deny them the sight.

She had reason to cling to the big hat in the days which followed; be-

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neath it her cheeks grew paler; Adelaide's were roses by comparison, blooming with an unknown happiness of which the poor little *menta* maker had never dreamed. A frail and consumptive creature she had always been, even when the two, as children, ran about the sands together. The Bonselli's daughter did not disdain her humbler playmate then, but now, as she met her, fancying a new pride in her bearing, she hated her. Adelaide was invariably there on the *molo* when the boats came; it was to her Mario waved his *beretta*, and the two walked off together as if already wed.

"Mary, aid me!" cried out the girl's heart, who watched, but externally she made no sign.

She stood one evening thus, watching Adelaide, who, with her tray of peppermints suspended about her neck and her busy, thin hands knitting

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steadily, scanned the incoming boats with eagerness. Gemma and two or three young men were jesting near, and Gina's eyes encountered Adelaide's just as Mario bounded up the landing steps.

"Bring me some *menta*," said Gina, haughtily, in a tone of command.

Adelaide flushed, but approached humbly; it was not for her to offend the Bonselli's daughter.

"Ten sticks," said Gina, coldly, tossing a half-franc down upon the tray.

"I have but seven, signorina," faltered Adelaide.

"Keep the change," responded Gina, taking the candy, with a disdainful gesture.

Adelaide flushed again, but before she could speak a quick brown hand snatched up the coin.

"Give the signorina her money!"

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Mario commanded, his voice quivering with anger. "We do not take charity."

Adelaide held out the money timidly.

"Take back your *menta*, then," said Gina, coldly.

"You are welcome to it, signorina," stammered Adelaide.

"I do not take *gifts*."

"There is the canal, then," replied Mario, coldly, indicating the dark stream. He bowed ironically, and passing his hand through Adelaide's arm, drew her away, without another glance at the group. A sharp splash attested the fate of the peppermint, but Mario walked straight ahead, unconsciously hastening his betrothed's footsteps to the limit of her strength. Suddenly he perceived that she was weeping softly.

"Do not mind it, *cara mia*," he

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said, with mingled kindness and bitterness. "It is not you she wished to insult."

"It is not only that," faltered she, wiping her eyes.

"What then?" His voice was unconsciously impatient.

"The seven soldi," murmured the poor girl. "If you knew, *amico mio*, how much they are to us."

He dropped her arm. "Those miserable soldi! Are they more to you than your good name—or mine, if you care nothing for yours! Would you have taken her charity, then?"

"No, oh, no!" cried Adelaide, frightened half to death. "Do not be angry, I beg of you. It is only that we have nothing more to make the *menta* of. It was the last I had; and we have eaten only *polenta* for a week, and seven soldi—it is so much—my mother would have been so pleased. Do not be angry

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with me!" She clasped his arm with her thin hands imploringly.

Had he loved her, it would have touched him or made him angrier. As it was, he stood a moment struggling with his solitary bitterness; then spoke gravely.

"Forgive me, Adelaide; it is I who was wrong. The *menta* was yours, and I know too well how much you need the money. I had not the three soldi; but to-morrow I shall have my share from the catch—perhaps to-night. I will bring the seven soldi to you."

"No, no," protested Adelaide. "It does not matter—if you are not angry."

"Why not?" replied he. "In a few weeks we shall share all. No, I am not angry. It is you who might be angry with me." He stroked the hand on his arm kindly, but even as he did so he knew in his heart that *she*

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against whom was all his bitterness would never have made such a mistake; she would never have had a tear for the seven soldi, had they been all that stood between starvation and her. He forgot what a lifetime of slow starvation does to break down the stubbornest pride. But he was very gentle to his betrothed, and her pale face bloomed again when he parted from her at the door. She did not hear the impatient sigh with which he turned away, nor dream that he would ever think again of the Bonselli's daughter after to-day.

The Bonselli's daughter did not dream so, either.

"He would not even touch my hand to give me back the money himself," she thought, over and over.

That night she frightened Gemma for the first time. Casting her hat recklessly on the bed, she flung herself

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after it, and sobbed so terribly that Gemma stood aghast, forgetting to go even to the rescue of the hat, which lay there crushed.

"He shall never marry her!" Gina cried, passionately. "I will put a malediction on her."

Gemma turned pale and crossed herself. "*Guai!* Gina," she exclaimed, "you would not do that; the priest says they come back to one!"

But Gina had already risen, silent and cold again, to her feet, and only responded with a shrug.

Nevertheless, Mario and Adelaide were married the following month, and began housekeeping, with Adelaide's old mother, in one of the smallest houses in town, back of the Albergo Europa; and on the next Sunday, according to custom, the newly married pair walked in the Pineta, where all the town might see them.

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Gina and Gemma walked there, also, and a nephew of the Vanni walked with Gina. He had a little shop in the town, and his uncle was known to be putting away money. Gina and Gemma wore new gowns and their large hats.

"*Chè!*" scoffed Gemma; "did you see the wife of Mario? Not a silk gown of any kind, but her marriage black! Moreover, it was made over from her mother's." She shrugged her shoulders.

But above that rusty black the face of Adelaide seemed to Gina to glow with triumph which there was no hat to hide, and she held Mario's arm with an air of possession.

Is there any suffering like this?

It wore into Gina's very life all summer, deepening with every outgoing of the boats, and each time that she stood among the crowd on the *molo* and

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beheld Adelaide, the wife, awaiting her husband's return, the lines of her face were drawn more sharply.

There was a change also in the face of Adelaide as the summer wore on; that pale countenance seemed thinner and paler; certain lines of delicacy, shadows of suffering, deepened about the blue eyes. Gina, who watched her incessantly, often surprised her with her gaze fastened on the distance, silent, while her shadowy hands knit rapidly.

"*Chè!*" said some one in her hearing; "the Adelaide grows more meagre all the time; a fisherman's wife—and she will have something besides her *menta* to carry before long." A laugh concluded the prophecy.

Gina started. She looked at Adelaide and hated her. A man may envy a rival lover; the woman knows there is a deeper rivalry than this.

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And at that moment Adelaide turned and looked at Gina with a new, an unfathomable expression, then turned again to the water, over which the boats, slowly propelled with oars, were advancing on a sea of golden glass.

"Mary, aid me!" prayed Gina, wildly. In how many tones of the soul's voice has not the Woman, both mother and virgin, been addressed.

"Mario is going on the long voyage," remarked Gemma, carelessly, a few days later. "And no wonder. They have scarcely bread now, and with another mouth to fill—" She shrugged her shoulders as usual.

Gina answered only with a counter-shrug.

"I wonder if she really did put the malediction on her?" thought Gemma, looking curiously at her sister. Mario's luck had been noticeably bad; his

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was the poorest catch invariably, and his boat—the *Buona Fortuna*—steadily belied its name.

Gemma whispered her wonder to the apothecary, who naturally was unable to solve it. It was not for him to say what power might reside in the malediction of his betrothed's sister. She was nothing like a sister any more, Gemma complained—this silent, gloomy girl, who would receive the attentions of nobody. "I would have taken up with somebody out of pride," said Gemma. "Now people all begin to say he jilted you."

What was it to Gina what they said? She stood on the *molo* when Mario went out on the long voyage, waving his hand to his pale wife as the big boat drew out of the canal; and as it swept slowly by, for the first time in months his eyes, instead of avoiding Gina's, looked straight into hers.

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All the summer following the Adelaide moved more and more slowly about the town, carrying with difficulty her tray of *menta*, for it was no disgrace for a fisherman's wife to do her part. Certainly she looked very badly, and as she crept about, people shook their heads in foreboding.

"They say," said Gemma one day, "that the Adelaide is in a bad way."

"She was always like a tallow candle," Gina answered, coldly.

"And they say"—Gemma cast a half-frightened glance at her sister—"they say you have put a malediction on her, and Mario will never come back."

Gina smiled contemptuously.

"But she did not deny it," Gemma whispered to her lover an hour later.

Who does not deny, admits. It was soon public property that the Bonselli's daughter admitted, without remorse,

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having put a malediction on that unhappy wife of Mario.

"Eh, Adelaide has a child, and no time lost," said the gossip of the town, stopping at the Albergo door one day.

"A masculine or a feminine?" inquired Signora Bonselli, with mild interest.

"A feminine, of course; when did the Adelaide ever have fortune?" responded the gossip, with a side glance at Gina as she said it.

"What *misfortune!*" sighed the compassionate signora, and a passing wonder crossed her whether her daughter could really have had the heart to push vengeance so far. Can there be a worse un-luck than girls in a fisherman's family?

"That is the beginning," she added, with a shrug, hoping Gina was taking this to heart.

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She was. The blood pounded through her veins like the sea in tempest.

Nobody thought of asking for the mother. In a town where every woman bore her twelve to fifteen, like a healthy vine, it was taken for granted she was competent to do her woman's work. It was not reckoned a peculiar hardship that the young father was absent at his first-born's birth; these are women's matters. Moreover, life and death are in the bondage of the sea, and the boats obey its tides.

In some fashion the Adelaide had fulfilled her part. Gina's eyes, ravenous with a hunger she did not try to conceal, being unaware of it, devoured her the first time she encountered the slender shape, the *menta* basket suspended a little to one side, and a bundle enveloped in a shawl on her arm. The knitting fingers were busy

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now with that restless load, at whose every motion the watcher quivered also. It was but natural Adelaide should walk wearily with that unwonted burden, and only when her eyes crept stealthily to the mother's face Gina felt a shock. The head was skull-like in its thinness, and the sunken eyes burned in their sockets. In that shock of surprise Gina encountered the covert glance and whisper of Gemma and her friends.

"They are saying I did it," she thought, and turned icily away.

"If Mario does not hasten, he will never see the Adelaide alive again," she overheard her mother confide to Gemma; then seeing Gina, she added, hastily: "She was always a poor thing; a woman who has not strength to make one baby!" She stopped helpless for a descriptive phrase.

Mario did not come. Weeks wore

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away, months, and that small portion of the universe which concerned itself with Mario and Mario's wife began to divide tearful prophecy between the two. Adelaide was going—that was plain to the blindest; had Mario already gone? The sea alone could answer, and its secretive waves, breaking hourly on the sands, laid no betraying token there. The *Buona Fortuna* sailed never into port.

"That comes of shipping in a Livornese vessel," said the conservatives. "One's own, one knows; but who can answer for strangers, men or boats."

Curious glances invested Gina. The Bonselli's daughter was exempt from much plain questioning, and her solitary nature exempted her from more; but the way Adelaide's mother looked at Gina when they met spoke for itself.

Adelaide went no longer to the *molo*,

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but the Bonselli's daughter never missed a home-coming of the boats.

"She looks as badly as the Adelaide," said the signora, complainingly. "It is a scandal in the town. What have I ever done that a daughter of mine should behave so?"

"If she really has put a malediction on her," remarked Gemma, pettishly, "I wish the priest would speak to her. It is no pleasure to have her about."

Nor was it in truth. It is hard for the shallow pool to have the turbulent ocean washing into it.

But if folk avoided her, it was all the easier for Gina to slip unnoted from the Albergo early into the still, empty church. There, with one treasure after another from her slender store, she bribed the coldly smiling Queen of Heaven.

"Send him back to me!"

"Send him back!"

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"Send him back—even to her!" as the endless summer of boats returning wore on, and the Good Fortune beat no golden track across the seas. Tempest after tempest wore itself out upon those waters, unworn after all the ages and rages of the sky. The sea is the only immortal.

Rising from her knees one morning, Gina confronted Adelaide's mother.

"Come," she said, briefly; "Adelaide wants you."

Gina followed without a word. Her feet faltered across the humble threshold of Mario's home and into the bare, clean little room, where Adelaide sat propped against cushions in the one comfortable chair, her eyes the only fire in the ashes of her wasted face.

"*Ecco, Adelaide,*" said the mother, with a marvellous change of expression, "here is the signorina." And abruptly she left them.

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"Accommodate yourself, signorina," said Adelaide, in gasps, indicating feebly the remaining chair. Gina silently drew it near and sank into it. The two looked at each other, a hundred things passing between them; then their common anguish broke from the lips of Adelaide.

"He is dead—he must be dead!"

The hands of the Bonselli's daughter worked convulsively, then fluttered up to her face. Adelaide's touch, burning and feeble, drew them down again.

"Signorina Bonselli," she said, "before I die, forgive me and take the malediction from me, or I shall not rest in my grave."

Gina sat dumbly.

"I did you a great wrong, but I did not mean it—believe that, signorina."

And still the Signorina Bonselli sat speechless.

"A great wrong, signorina," went

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on Adelaide, clasping her thin hands; "for though I wished Mario well—oh, well!—I was proud above all that I, who was nobody, had taken your lover away. I thought more of that than of Mario. And for months after I was proud, for I could see in your eyes that you envied me—oh, signorina, forgive me! I did not know—I did not really know; for though Mario was very good and gentle—*proprio un angelo*—he never loved me, signorina; I did not know it at first, but later I knew."

She turned her head, and Gina's eyes, following involuntarily, took in the child asleep in its rude cradle at her side. When she looked back she was struck with the change in the mother's face. "Will you give her to me, signorina?" she said, a pale, sweet smile shining in her eyes and lips. "Will you put her in my lap?"

Tremblingly, Gina stooped her

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strong young arms and lifted Mario's little daughter, a mere shadow-baby, from the pillow. She laid it in the mother's lap, and Adelaide, leaning back against the cushions with a look of great content, devoured its features. She caressed one tiny claw in her own thin fingers, while Gina sat watching like one benumbed.

"Ah," breathed Adelaide, gently, bending a great look of love upon her child, "that teaches one! When the little one came, so like Mario—for she is very like Mario, signorina," she added earnestly—"then all I had ever felt for Mario before seemed as nothing. Night and day I hungered for him—night and day; and I knew what it is to love, and that he had never really loved me—not like that! And then it was I began to see it in your eyes—the hunger, signorina—forgive me!"

She held them with her own now. .

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"Ah, yes," said the wife, softly, "it is all there; and at first I was angry to think you felt it, as if it robbed me, but by and by I came to love you for it, because you cared, too; nobody else in all the town cared, only just we two—and I had my baby. Ah, signorina, that is why *you* must forgive *me*—for *that* I have taken from you forever. Even if Mario came back and loved you, it is I who have been his wife, and the *bambina* is mine; nothing can take that away or make it different." She dwelt gaspingly a moment upon that triumphant anguish, even while her eyes implored the stony dumbness of the girl before her. "I do not even blame you for putting the malediction on me," she said, piteously; "but now that Mario is dead and I am dying, take it from me, signorina, that I may die at peace!"

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The Bonselli's daughter dropped on her knees beside the sick woman.

"I never put any malediction on you, Adelaide—never! But, oh," she burst into tears and bowed her head in her hands, "I have hated you for being his!"

"*Povera Gina!*" said Adelaide, speaking in the old tone, as when they were girls together; but she was too weak to say more.

Gina controlled her sobs quickly.

"You must not die, Adelaide; perhaps he will yet come. Only this morning I vowed all my gold and coral set to the Virgin if she would send him—even to you." The last was broken with a great sob.

"Poor Gina!" said Adelaide again, but she shook her head. "If he came, I shall not be here. But even then," she added quickly, "he would remember us always." She drew the child closer.

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"Is the *bambina* ill?" asked Gina, reading that motion, and startled.

Adelaide nodded. "Better so," she hastened to say, almost jealously, as Gina bent quickly above the little face. "I could not leave her to any. Even Mario would not love her enough, because—because—" The first tears dropped slowly down her cheeks.

"Thank you for coming, signorina," she said in a different tone; "and go now, I have so little strength. I can die in peace, now that I know it is not the malediction."

Gina seized the thin, hot hands in her strong one.

"Adelaide, I will vow a candle to every altar of the Virgin—"

Adelaide smiled faintly. "Go now, signorina; some one might see you here. *Addio, addio!*"

Her eyes followed the girl to the

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door with an unenvious look of mute resignation—the look of those who have done with all—and then turned with sweetness upon the child in her lap.

The pale mother and child were scarce paler when, six days later, the village followed them to their grave.

Only the Bonselli's elder daughter came never near, either at the house or the cemetery, and on the whole it was held she did well to keep away; there had been authentic cases where the utterer of a malediction had been stricken at the victim's grave. One thing was certain—the girl looked more like a corpse every month, which was also easily accounted for: the mother of Adelaide had put a malediction, in her turn, on her daughter's murderer.

"I wish she would take the Vanni's nephew," grumbled Signor Bonselli,

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"to put a stop to tongues; and then look at the monument Vanni is building in the cemetery—he has money to burn."

Gina, however, would have nothing to do with the Vanni's nephew. Gemma was to marry the young shopkeeper—a great affair; but Gina took no interest in anything—only she never missed a home-coming of the boats.

One day she asked her mother for ten francs.

It is not a sum to be lightly handled, but the signora, who hoped Gina had some rational girl's desire in her head, after a little cautious delay, gave it to her.

"The truth is, you do need new ribbons for that dress of yours, Gina," she said, as a leader.

"Yes," assented her daughter sombrely, and quietly slipped out with the market-basket (the Bonselli were not

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above doing their marketing), and went to a shop where ribbons were sold, surely, but of a singular kind. The ribbon was wide and long and black, attached to a wreath of silver leaves. "I order it for a friend," she explained to the merchant, who asked, "What name?" "No name." And the merchant thought nothing, for All-Souls' was at hand.

Every one knows the proper time to carry offerings for the dead, and no one who can avoid it will willingly bring his before his neighbours. Promptly in the afternoon the cake and chestnut vendor takes up his station at the gates of the Campo Santo, and for the next four hours the Pineta is a walking procession of portraits, largely post-mortem, and of wreaths, upborne by mourners, sorrowing, cheerful, or resigned.

Thus Gina, counting with safety on

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the hour of dawn, and young and fleet of foot, had no reason to fear detection as she hastened in the first grey light through the pines and beyond to the open gates of the cemetery. Just within, the Vanni monument reared its huge mass, as if saying, "See, under me you might one day repose, if you would!" But Gina sped by softly to the farther and the poorer part of the enclosure.

The simple mound beneath which Mario's wife and child lay bore as yet no stone—how should the aged mother compass one?—and was distinguished by no railing: who knew where he who might have honoured it was lying? Beside it, Gina threw herself in a very passion of despair. The dead Adelaide seemed the nearest thing to her in all the universe, and her she envied, even in the grave, still triumphant with his child in her dead arms. She envied

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her, and she besought her, instinctively, as though the dead Adelaide were become more powerful than the Virgin.

"Send him back to me—oh, send him back to me! You had him—let me have him now!" she cried, dumbly, to the dumb sod. Taking the wreath from the box, she carefully spread it above the mound, pulling out the leaves and laying the wide ribbons to the best advantage with an instinct that was racial rather than personal.

Rising wearily from this task, she faced Adelaide's mother, a handful of home-made tissue-paper flowers in her hand.

"You killed her; why are you here?" said the old woman. The paper flowers shook in her shaking hand. "You are trying to make your peace with her—hypocrite! Who put that there?"

The last words were uttered in

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amazement, one lean finger pointing quiveringly to the splendid wreath.

"I did." It never occurred to the girl, indifferent to all things now, to conceal the truth.

"Ah!" exclaimed the mother, wavering between anger and extorted admiration of the wreath, to which her eyes seemed glued, "you want to make things smooth. You put the malediction on her, and now you are frightened."

"I am not." Gina sprang to her feet. "The Adelaide knows—"

"She was a soft-hearted fool, who believed what she was told by any one," replied the mother, harshly, with undertones of anguish. "Didn't I see her fade away under it? Was she ever sick till then? Take away your wreath—" (But Gina noted the hesitation in her eyes.) "Now that she is dead, you think he will come back;

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but he is dead, too. He will never come back."

"How do you know—what do you know?" She sprang across the grave and seized the old woman by the arm.

"Never mind; he is dead, I tell you. You will never see him again. *Mother of God!*"

"Mother!" said Mario, gently, as Gina, whiter than Adelaide ever had been, dropped silently beside the grave; "it is only I."

"All the saints! all the saints!" murmured the old woman over and over, crossing herself again and again, while Mario, heeding neither her nor the tense figure on its knees across the grave, with eyes staring from its white face, dropped quietly on his own knees and kissed the sod above his wife's head and feet. His lips moved silently. Then he rose and held out his hand to her mother.

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"If she had lived," he said, "I would have tried to make her happy. Let me take you home now, mother."

"Not till I have cursed her!" cried the old woman, trembling with grief and rage, and pointing a shaking hand at Gina. "She put the malediction on my Adelaide, who lies here with your child; I will put the malediction on her. She has no right to be happy with my Adelaide dead."

"Mother!" said Mario, gently.

"It is not true, Mario; I put no malediction on her—the Adelaide knew—" The white lips spoke imploringly.

"I know, I know." He took the old woman's hand. "See," he said, soothingly, "Adelaide is at peace. The wrong was all mine; you do not wish me ill, mother?"

"I wish you no harm," persisted the old woman, tremulously. "You were her husband, and good to her,

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and she wished you well; but if you marry that one, I will put the malediction on her. She shall lie here as my Adelaide does."

Mario started as if the trembling hand struck him. Still he avoided looking at the girl opposite.

"Mother," he exclaimed, "you do not know what you are saying! It is the Signorina Bonselli."

"I put the malediction on her—I put it on her!" reiterated the old woman, raising one withered hand.

At that gesture Mario turned, the eyes of the two met across Adelaide's grave, and involuntarily Mario held out his arms. The next moment Gina was in them.

"Have no fear, have no fear!" he murmured, brokenly, while he drew her close, as if he would protect her with his body from the threatened danger.

"I have no fear," she answered,

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looking into his eyes. "Let her put the malediction on me—*anima mia, dolce amore mio*—" The rest was one dumb murmur of kisses rained upon his eyelids, his cheeks, his hands, his clothing. It was Mario who put her gently—oh, gently!—away at last, with a mute gesture towards the figure at their feet.

The old woman was lifting the wreath with trembling hands; one could see in her eyes how they grew to it covetously. "Take it," she said, bitterly. "She will have the shabbiest grave in the cemetery; let it be so, when her husband forgets her!"

"No, oh, no!" Gina laid a kind young hand on the aged and trembling one. "Do not take it away. Put the malediction on me just the same, but let the wreath stay, I beg you."

The old woman fumbled blindly among the flowers.

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"It—it is a good wreath," she muttered, "and the Adelaide would have liked it." The grey head sank upon the metal garland, and she burst into tears.

"Mother," said Mario, tenderly, "she shall have another; you shall help me choose it to-day—and a little one for the child. All the village shall see that we do not forget." He lifted her gently, and looked at Gina, but without touching her hand even.

"Until we meet again," he said, gravely.

"Until we meet again," Gina murmured, responsively; and as the figures of Mario and the tottering old mother passed slowly from sight, she fell once more on her knees beside the little mound.

So common a marvel it is for the sea to give up its dead that the return of

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Mario was not more than a three days' wonder. The marriage of the Bonselli's daughter was much more.

"It is incredible that she will persist in marrying him," exclaimed the poor Signora Bonselli. The Signor Bonselli shrugged his shoulders silently.

"*Basso, brutto, povero*, a widower, and with a malediction on one!" said Gemma, shivering and crossing herself. "She must be a *passa*."

It was not to be, however, until Mario had mourned his wife the due time, his honest face wearing a gravity which well became it, the signet of death escaped and death suffered.

"No one can say that he has not shown the Adelaide every respect," said all. "Her grave was the richest in the Campo Santo on All-Souls' Day—three wreaths, and one knows what they cost. If Mario had not a good heart, he would have thought

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before putting all those francs into it. And masses said as if she were a signora." It warmed the common heart to the widower, and even Gina became an object of relenting, if not compassion, when it was whispered that she, too, was under a malediction, and yet "wished Mario so well" that she would still wed him. The world loves a lover, but the Italian feels personally indebted to him.

The marriage was to be nothing splendid like Gemma's; Gina vetoed the parents' proposal of a double wedding, and the unfitness was so obvious no one could urge it. Gemma made a rich match. The very wardrobes of the two sisters told the tale, and cost the soft-hearted Signora Bonselli many secret tears. The Bonselli were just people, but what use would silk gowns be to a fisherman's wife? Gina was married in the usual black stuff,

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and her mother consoled herself by seeing to it that the wedding *confetti*, at least, were all they should be. Nothing could make the breakfast gay. All the customary *poesie* seemed out of place when one was marrying a widower, and poor, and with a malediction of unknown potency hanging over one. Gina was scrutinised with a curiosity many a fairer bride escapes; to many of the guests she was already as good as dead. Nor did it fail to be remarked that Bonselli himself upset a flask of oil, and that the bread was unwittingly left upside down on the plate, though the Signora Bonselli hastily turned it over, and everybody pretended not to see. Certainly it was not a gay wedding.

It softened even Gemma's heart to her sister, and she followed her upstairs, when she was about to leave, with a mingled compassion and disapproval.

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Gina's big feathered hat hung on the wall, and Gemma stood and watched her sister curiously while she tied a black lace scarf about her head and knotted it loosely beneath her chin. Gemma forgave her all her sins at that moment. And at that moment Gina smiled at her, and walked away down the stairs. Mario was waiting at the foot, and the whole family stood to watch them depart by the little garden path leading to the new home.

"There will be a baby every year," sighed the signora, forebodingly.

The father shrugged his shoulders, divided between a curious comprehension and a keen realisation that the Vanni monument was lost forever to the family.

"*Basso, brutto, povero,*" repeated Gemma to herself, disdainfully, yet with awe, for, after all, it was her sister who was perhaps as good as dead.

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Low and plain and poor was also the little home to which Mario led his bride, though not quite so barren as the Adelaide's had been; the Bonselli pride had softened all that Mario's would allow, but it was still a very humble place to bring the Bonselli's daughter to. The consciousness of this smote Mario so vividly that he turned, with the door already open, and looked at the girl with a dreadful doubt. The look he met banished every doubt forever, and it was with the gesture of a prince entering his kingdom that he lifted her in his arms across the threshold and closed the door.

Oreste's Patron



Oreste's Patron

The Signore Americano, musing over his morning coffee on the villa terrace, gazed intently into the distance where Florence lay invisible behind the hills.

"*Buon' giorno*, signore!" called Oreste, reining in Elisabetta and lifting his cap with a smile.

"*Buon' giorno!*" returned the signore, starting. "Ah, you are going to the city, and I wanted to go myself."

Oreste looked troubled.

"Signore, how much I am sorry! It displeases me, but I am already promised to my patron. When one is poor one must think of the francs for the family," he added, apologetically.

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The signore, who knew no such necessity, frowned.

"This is the fifth time this Carnivale—and you just married. If I had a *sposina*—"

"The signore's *sposina* would lack for nothing," smiled Oreste. "We others—we must do as we can. As for Gioja, she goes to pass the day with her *nonna* at Vincigliata. I will bring the signore's mail as usual."

The signore waved his hand impatiently and knocked the ashes from his cigarette; then as the shabby cab, with Elisabetta pulling heroically back against the steepness, wound from sight, his glance softened. It was a piece of fortune surely for a Vignola cabman to have a city patron. Fortunes were not to be made up here, where nobody but the *forestieri*, who came from time to time to make a *villeggiatura* in one or another of the

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villas, would think of wasting francs for the sole purpose of getting somewhere. The inhabitants stayed where they found themselves placed by Providence. To all intents Vignola might be a hundred miles from Florence, instead of a bare six. Besides, a stranger signore passes with the season, but a city patron remains. Nuisance as it was to have his own plans conflicted with, the signore forgave Oreste.

Fifteen minutes later this melting mood congealed again, as a slender figure stole quietly down the Way.

It was Gioja, walking with her usual listless grace. Her small head, its crisply waved Tuscan hair bound with a kerchief of dull blue, was carried far back, as no kerchiefed head has a right to be, and her eyes, blue as the kerchief, but not dull, looked straight ahead, dilated and musing. She did not see the signore—a thing that

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could have befallen no other girl in the village, unless it were blind Chiara, and the signore watched her go with a frown. For this was not the direction of Vincigliata. And why was she starting so early, unless to defeat the glances with which all these closed doors would soon be alive?

Yet he continued to watch her. There were other girls in the village just as pretty. Many a strain of noble blood had gone to the making of these Vignolese peasants. This was not the first girl the signore had seen who looked as if—change her gown and tie a bonnet over her hair—she might loll in her carriage of an afternoon at the Cascine with the best of the fine ladies in the city below. But there was no other whom the signore ever leaned over the wall to look after. And as he leaned his frown deepened; he was sorry for Oreste, but—marry a girl like

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that and leave her alone in Italy! Anybody might foresee the end. And he frowned again, not at Gioja this time, who had disappeared from view, but at a mental image wearing, it is true, an air dangerously like that of Oreste's *sposa*.

Yes, indeed, anybody might foretell the end. That was what the whole community, already buzzing with the scandal, said. And it was exactly what the padre said, when, five minutes later, he came up the path and sank upon the marble seat, mopping his brow beneath the beaver hat.

"I have been to Oreste's," he said, apologetically, "and thought I would look in upon the signore in passing. There was nobody there."

The signore, engaged in pouring red wine for his guest, made no response, and the priest stole a troubled glance at him as he took the glass from his hand.

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"Perhaps, signore, you may have seen them pass, and can tell me if that child went with her husband?"

"No," said the signore, after a minute's deliberation, "I could not."

His guest sighed as he sipped the wine. He had grown grey in the service of the village. He had known Gioja from her babyhood. His was the hand which had held and oiled and dipped her at the font, and had led her from then until her present estate; and he, if any one, had a right to borrow trouble, seeing that all troubles were brought to him in the end. His fine, thin lips shut above the wine-glass in the sensitive line which marks the better of Rome's two types. His soul was straight and simple. The one vanity it owned was to be on terms of companionship with the occupant of the big villa. The half-hour on its terrace or in its *salotto* formed his

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social dissipation, and dearly did he prize the importance it gave him in the eyes of his flock. Nay, it gave importance to the whole community.

"Not every village has a priest like ours," said the gossips complacently, "that a so educated stranger signore would make so much of."

Moreover, if his people were poor, God alone knows how poor their priest was, and the signore possessed a fine taste in wines—true Chianti, a very different thing from *vino rosso* at eighty centesimi the flask—while his lavishness was that of his country.

As for the signore, he would pour the oil from a fresh flask any time to unseal the lips pressed together, as now, over the case of Oreste's *sposa*.

"The truth is," sighed the priest, "the end is too easy to foresee. The child is not like others, and there is nothing worse than that. That's what

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Luigi's *sposa* said yesterday when I rebuked her for thinking evil, and recalled to her how Gioja helped nurse her three through the *tifo* only last spring. 'Oh, I'm not saying she hasn't a heart,' said Luigi's *sposa*, 'but you can't deny that all is not right when a girl is different from all the rest; it is better to have less heart and be more like one's neighbours.' And Luigi's wife had reason. Nothing is worse than to be different from all the folk about you. When I had her safely married I thought indeed there would be an end of trouble. Heaven grant it do not prove a beginning."

"Does she not love her husband?"

"Who can tell?" sighed the priest, impatiently. "Oreste is not one to set the Arno afire, but he is a good lad. But about her he is a mule—a very mule. Would you believe, signore,

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when I ventured a word—I, whose duty it is—he flared up like a *befana* torch, he whose manner to me ordinarily is a lesson to the community.”

The signore smiled, and reflected upon the strength of man.

“One would say I had spoken ill of the saints,” continued the exasperated priest. “And the thing is becoming insufferable—such a tale of scandal as some one whispers to me every day! One would think she has neither eyes nor ears, and cares not whether she has friends or foes for neighbours.”

There is, in truth, no such broad and flowery path to unpopularity as this which Gioja undeviatingly pursued. Nobody who elects to be unlike his neighbours gets social good of it. Had not the signore himself seen?

Bad enough it was to have her sitting wide-eyed and absolutely indifferent at her machine—and so pretty that

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one could see the lads looking at her when they pretended not to—or mooning over her straw work with never a word of gossip or a little story about a friend, more than if they were all stones; but what did these absences all by herself mean, which looked the worse now that she was a decent man's wife? It was an absolute scandal—which is only another name for a god-send sometimes—to a sober community.

Oreste might pretend to shut his eyes—he had always been a fool about her; but it could not be asked that all the village should do the same, especially those girls who would have made decent wives if any one had given *them* the chance, and those lads who would have known how to keep a wife in order if they had taken one.

The priest, thinking of these things, sighed. He, too, might affect blind-

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ness, but he would need to be stone deaf as well to escape hearing what every tongue in the village felt it a duty and a privilege to confide to him daily.

"It must be admitted that the Signorina Americana has something to answer for," the priest wound up, as he invariably did, and always with an indulgent accent which forgave while it accused.

The Signorina Americana! How many times was she not levelled at the ears of the Signore Americano, who had inherited her tradition with the villa of which he was the next lessee. If the *contadini* were to be believed, there was little for which she might not be held accountable. They spoke of her smilingly, Oreste tenderly, the priest indulgently (the signorina also had possessed a generous taste in wines), and Gioja not at all. Yet ap-

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parently it was precisely Gioja who might have had most to say.

"Ah, yes; if I could have foreseen when I brought that child to her! But what harm could come to her from earning a few francs as the signorina's maid? I chose her for the very reason that she had more gentleness and was more educated than the others. The signorina, your countrywoman, was herself very educated and full of *gentilezza*. But she was too good to Gioja, and then she could never be made to see. She had a way with her. When I began to remonstrate with her she would fill up my glass and ask about my poor, and before I knew it—*altro!* she was very generous, your countrywoman. But if there are many like her in your country, it must be a terrible place; a man would not possess his own soul."

The signore laughed.

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"She would sit here—precisely where I sit now—and smile a little smile she had, and twist this rose-vine about her fingers, and just so she twisted us all. Ah," he concluded, lifting his glass, "she was truly terrible, that signorina! but *simpatica*, *altro!* never have I seen so *simpatica* a signorina."

Simpatica! When you are that, there is nothing else you can be; and when you are not that, nothing that you can be is of any use. When everybody, down to the newsboys and cab-openers, loves you and doesn't know why, you are *simpatica*; when people would rather do things for you than not, and don't care about the payment, then you may be sure you are *simpatica*; when the expression of their eyes and the tones of their voice change insensibly when they look at and speak to you, there is no room to

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doubt that you are *simpatica*. You may not be rich, nor beautiful, nor "educated" (such a very different thing from book-fed), but you do not need to be. *Simpatica* is the comprehending sky of praise in which separate stars of admiration are swallowed up. While the signore figured rapidly the mischief possible of accomplishment by a dangerous signorina possessing this attribute, the priest drank another glass of wine and returned to the trouble of his soul.

"I thought, indeed, with a wife's work to do, she would settle down like others, but Oreste encourages her wilfulness."

"Why do you not speak to Gioja herself?"

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed the priest, crossing himself. "I have tried that once. She has a terrible nature, that child! I have never told any one,

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but see if I have not reason to say so, signore." He sipped his wine agitatedly, and then began with feeling:

"It was the signorina to begin with; she saw that the child was pretty, and she put ideas in her head. And in fact, though heaven forbid I should compare Gioja, who is only a little *contadina*, with a real signorina, yet she has always seemed to me to have a little something about her which recalls the signorina herself—a way of walking and carrying her head. And the signorina had not an idea of keeping her in her place. She was always giving her gowns and ribbons and trinkets and vanities of all kinds—that was her way, always giving. The end of it was that one day I surprised that child with a hat of the signorina's on her unhappy head—yes, actually, signore, if you will credit me, a hat, a

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cappello di signora on her head!" He spread his hands in deprecating despair.

The signore looked blankly.

"Oh, signore, you are like your countrywoman; it is impossible to make you understand! But it must be a country—yours! For a girl like Gioja to put a hat on is to declare herself without shame at once. Honest girls of her class let such *roba di signore* alone—yes, and rightly, for God has put people in their places. A girl who showed herself in a signora's hat would find it impossible to live in Vignola; she would be hooted out of the village. And as for the wife of a lad like Oreste pretending to that, half a dozen lovers would not be a worse scandal. Those, at least, the others could understand, but a *cappello di signora*—" He stopped to take several agitated sips, shaking his head all the time. "I do not say she would have been so mad

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as to cross the threshold in it—the signorina had given it to her to sell for the feathers upon it—but who could tell what such a girl might do? I scolded her well for her wicked vanity and such ideas above her place. Santa Maria! lovers and such are enough without a scandal like that among my people. Well, what was the end? Signore, she rushed off and hung that hat with at least twenty francs' worth of good feathers on it in the Madonna's chapel, beside 'Masso's crutch and the little hearts and legs and other offerings to Our Lady! There it hung, where all the world would see it and every tongue in the place be set wagging, if I had not providentially gone in and found it before mass next day. And even then what could I do? It was the Madonna's, and I dared not remove it. But heaven sends accidents, and as it chanced, *providen-*

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tially, signore, my candle brushed the feathers in passing, and *presto*, I dropped it quickly into a bucket of water. It was not fit for Our Lady after that, so I took it away, and I myself made it up to her in candles, that no one might feel hurt. And after all, nobody was the richer for all those francs' worth of feathers; they were singed more than I hoped, and did not bring me in Florence the price of the candles. Oh, she has a terrible nature—that Gioja! No, no, *grazie*—if I must speak to Oreste, I must; but to her!—candles cost, Signore Americano, and I am a poor man."

Still shaking his head, he rose to depart.

The signore, left alone, paced the terrace a few times, smiling to himself; then he sat down again—this time in the priest's place—and fell to musing,

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and as he mused his fingers stole almost furtively to the long rose-tendrils, and twisted them gently, while the smile died abruptly on his lips.

Presently he rang, and Giuseppina came out.

"You may take away these things," said the signore, "and bring me pen and paper. Oh, and by the way, Giuseppina, in future put my seat here—the valley sees itself better."

Coming from the post that evening the signore was aware of a slender shape slipping along through the deepening shadows ahead. Quickening his steps, he overtook it easily.

"*Buona sera*. So it is you, Gioja?"

"*Si*, signore!" The voice was both startled and appealing.

But the signore strode along, looking keenly at the downcast face.

"Oreste is not with you?"

"No, signore; he went to the city."

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"And you have doubtless been visiting your grandmother?"

"Yes, signore." The voice was almost inaudible.

The signore turned on his heel with a curt "*Buona sera!*" and was still muttering things under his breath when, fifteen minutes later, he beheld from the terrace Oreste and Elisabetta toiling wearily up the hill.

"How well she times it!" he thought, contemptuously, as the bell of the big gate sounded, and he heard Giuseppina's challenge, "Who is it?"

"*Amici*, friends," answered Oreste's voice, and Oreste swiftly followed with his frank smile and a square envelope of dull blue, which the signore's hand involuntarily stretched to grasp.

"*Ecco*, signore, the only one!" said Oreste, with that polite gesture of regret with which he daily accompanied this small comedy. The signore hav-

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ing possessed himself of the letter avidly, put it into his pocket with ostentatious carelessness, and coolly lighted a cigarette. Oreste smiled comprehendingly but respectfully.

"You have had a long day of it?"

"Yes, signore." Oreste smiled with the satisfied air of one who has done a good day's work.

"I suppose you have made a handful of money," continued the signore, severely.

Oreste shrugged his shoulders. "Not great things, but *altro!* I am content."

The signore shrugged in his turn. "Each to his own mind. Your *sposina* has also made a long day; I saw her just now."

"Ah, yes; it is a long way to Vincigliata when one must walk. The signore's commands?"

"None."

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Truly, the Signorina Americana, if this was her work, had small reason to be proud of it. The signore's frown enveloped even the blue envelope, at which he stood staring long after Oreste had left the room.

And so it ran through the spring months—the mournfully beautiful Tuscan spring. The nightingales in the villa gardens sang and sang at dusk, in the moonlight, and at dawn, and the fireflies glittered all through the darkness up and down the olive slopes. An intenser life quickened in the little community as the summer stirred in the veins of her children. The youths went singing up and down the hills, and the girls and women lingered over their water-jars at the fountain in the square. For what is it to be poor in the summer-time?

Sometimes the signore, lying awake at night, heard Oreste's mellow voice

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as he passed by to the little house. But through all this gaiety of being Gioja stole silently and dreamily, and the whisper of turned heads and eyes askance followed her. For there were the ever-recurring *festas*, when Oreste went to the city, and where then did Oreste's *sposa* go? That is what the community would like to know, for the tale about her grandmother was quite too large for the village throat. She kept her secret well—yes; but there is only one kind of a secret possible to the Italian mind.

“*Birbone!*” said the women, with contempt, of Oreste, while the men laughed and shrugged their shoulders. Oreste had caught a pretty *sposa*, who had thought herself much too good for them, but *ma chè*, he was paying for it.

It was impossible that the public curiosity should content itself with

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being curious. Maria, one of those public-minded souls which never lack in any community, toiled all the way over to Vincigliata, and brought back personal assurance from the *nonna* herself that that pious granddaughter had not been seen in Vincigliata all these months.

"Eight good miles I trudged in all that sun, and a day's work lost!" declared Maria, mopping her brow in the midst of an excited and sympathetic group. "*If* my legs ache! but for the good of the community I did it, and what I know to-night the priest shall know before morning. I made haste to go to-day, for to-morrow being the *festa* of our Saint John, Oreste goes to the city, and that *civetta*—"

And nobody could say but that Maria had done well and the girl deserved whatever might come of it.

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But when the priest, sad-eyed and stern, knocked at the door of the little house in the early morning after mass, no one was there. Having delivered a vain fusillade, to the accompaniment of many suggestions offered from the neighbours' windows, the priest turned away, and betook himself with a clouded brow to the signore, who had invited him by Oreste to breakfast with him that morning. He was waiting for him now on the terrace with a morning countenance, and the breakfast-table, heaped with roses, wore a festal air, which did not escape the priest, preoccupied though he was.

"You also are keeping a feast, signore, to appearances?"

"Yes."

"Ah, indeed! a *festa Americana*?"

"No, my own. And now what is it about these two? Oreste, I know,

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went to the city. I tried to engage him, but he was pre-engaged to that patron of his. And Gioja—well, I saw her pass a little later.”

“While we were in the church, the guilty child!” said the priest, sternly. “But where can she have gone?” he added, sighing. “I have been much to blame; I have been too negligent; I should have dealt with her from the first. *Colpa mia!*” He crossed himself and looked so discouraged that the signore was touched.

“Listen, *amico mio*,” he said. “As you say, it is a bad business, and arrange it how you will, it will never be well that those two shall live here. The last of it will never be heard, if I know your people. I am going away to Livorno next week, and I have asked Oreste to go with me. I like the fellow, and away from here she may come to her senses. She is young,

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and guilty though she may be, she does not seem casehardened."

"Going away!" exclaimed the startled priest in dismay. "And going to take those two away from their own country—to a foreign place! What an idea—but what an idea!"

"Scarcely foreign; it is only the other side of Florence."

"Ah, ah! to you, but to us villagers! It is not a little thing to leave one's home, where one has been born and bred and knows his neighbours after all, whether they be good or bad. It is a great thing to know one's neighbours. And to go so far—but they will think twice before they say 'yes.' "

"On the contrary, Oreste goes willingly. I do not think he is so blind; he knows well they are not friendly to his *sposa* here."

"And Gioja," said the startled priest; "will she go?"

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"He says so."

The priest drew a long breath, half relief, half regret, and wholly wonder.

"Well, well; it is perhaps the best that could happen; but to lose two of my flock—and to leave one's country like that! You are a strange people, you Americans. And what becomes of us without either you or the Signorina Americana here in the villa?"

"There are more Americans," replied the signore, smiling; "and who knows but that your signorina will return, to make you more trouble yet?"

The priest shook his head. "The next time she may bring her own maid; not another girl from our village shall she turn the head of—that signorina." And the very tone of his voice as he said it was witness that he affirmed what he knew to be false. The signore understood, and laughed.

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"Put it all away, *amico mio*, for to-day, and go with me to Florence. Gioja has gone, and you can do nothing but listen to your people, who will deafen you before night. Come and see your *bella Firenze* in her *fiesta* dress. We will take a tram below, and find a cab at the gates."

The priest's face brightened like a child's.

"Ah, signore, now it is I you are proposing to carry away; but why not? It is long since I was in Florence, and I have already said service here. But it is not necessary to say anything to my people; discretion, Signore Americano, discretion is a great thing."

And thus it happened that when the village folk saw the good father depart in company with the signore *forestiere*, they sagely concluded — with that sense of the importance of our own

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affairs common to the race—that the two had gone to Fiesole, or who knew but even Florence, to consult the authorities in the matter of that *disgraziata* Gioja. And in point of fact, though the priest was fairly running away from the subject, he was destined to run straight into its arms instead.

Florence was all in *festa*, and if there is anything lovelier than Florence in *festa*, who has seen it? The streets ran over with bright sunshine, and the Florentines, reinforced by *contadini* from all the neighbouring towns, in holiday garb, made a bright shifting mass for the sunbeams to play over. Arno rolled its now shallow stream like muddy gold, and pale golden palaces stood loftily up and looked down at her. Over her streaming Ways Florence shook the bells in all her towers every fifteen minutes, and at intervals the deep golden-throated

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voice in Giotto's Tower answered with a rich hum, hum-m, hum-m-m, like a melodious summer bee. The strident notes of the *grilli* in their little wicker cages, brought from the Cascine at dawn, completed the joyous pandemonium.

The signore's spirits ran at higher tide than even the bright tide of humanity about him. He laughed at all; he bought flowers of the boys and girls who ran after the carriage, holding up glowing armfuls, until the carriage-seat was heaped and the priest held up his hands at the extravagance. He climaxed his folly by buying all the remaining *grilli* in their cages and letting them loose upon the grass of the Cascine.

"Do not scold, *amico mio*," he said to the priest, gaily. "I told you it is a *festa*. I have come into a fortune, and it is written that nobody must be

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shut up to-day or hungry." He tossed a handful of soldi to a group of children.

"I am afraid your fortune will not last long," replied the priest, shaking his head.

But he forgot his own prudence when, a little later, they went to a restaurant—not Doney's, where the foolish tourists go, fancying themselves in Italy, and where the priest would have been miserable, but Gilli's, on the Piazza Signoria. There, it being a feast day and his host newly come into a fortune, the good father ate, for the honour of religion and his own temporal good, such a meal as had never before found its way to his stomach, and washed it down with glasses of Chianti, not merely old (*vecchio*), but extravagantly old (*stravecchio*). Golden moments were these, and he put down his glass at last with

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a sigh of regret that it was impossible to prolong them further. His limit of possibility was reached.

"Now," said the signore, casting an extravagant fee upon the table, "where next?"

"To the Baptistery and the Duomo, my son," answered the priest, with sudden gravity, crossing himself, "to say our *grazie* and put up a little prayer to our good Saint John."

It was precisely upon emerging from the door of Gilli's in this comfortable and untroubled frame of mind, arising from the perfect balance of the carnal and the spiritual, that he came face to face with the worst trouble of all. For, straightening his shabby hat and smoothing his shabby cassock, what should his eyes fall upon but Oreste—Oreste, who, having that moment emerged from a café below, was assisting a very elegant signora into his cab.

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Just as he got her safely tucked in, his eye caught the two pairs staring at him. His sturdy face blanched; then before either could make a step forward, he had shut the door, sprung quickly to the seat, and touching up Elisabetta, with a glance of defiance, whirled away. The two left staring drew a long breath.

"*Ebbene*," remarked the signore at last, "so the patron was a patroness; perhaps Gioja has not been so much to blame after all."

"I will know," answered the priest, sharply.

The signore said a word to the nearest cabman, slipping something into his hand, and in a moment they were bowling up the Via Calzaioli. It cost a city cabman nothing to keep Elisabetta in sight, and they drew up in the Piazza del Duomo just in time to see Oreste deferentially assisting his

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signora to alight at the cathedral steps. He saw them, and his eye shot such a glance of stern warning that both men sat stupidly, and the next moment nearly fell over each other as the signora in her silks and nodding plumes swept by—for lo, it was Gioja!

In another instant she had swept up the steps and the great doors had swallowed her. Then Oreste's manner changed. He leaned against the cab door and turned upon the two men a regard which said, "And now, what have you to say about it?"

There was a decidedly awkward silence while they drew near; then the signore burst out laughing.

"You have found a *bel patron, amico mio!*" he said.

"What folly!" ejaculated the priest, holding up his hands and recovering breath at last. "*Gran' Dio!* what folly!"

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"Reverendo," replied Oreste, quietly, "perhaps not so much folly as some of you have thought. Perhaps I know what the tongues up there wag like, and if I choose not to mind, whose affair is that? If it pleases us to please ourselves, who is the worse for that?"

"And the scandal!" exclaimed the priest; "and the waste, and the ideas you are putting in Gioja's head—the wicked vanity and pride. Oh, I told the signorina how it would end!"

"As for that, reverendo, you will pardon me, but tongues must wag when they are hung in the middle, and if they wag about Gioja, why it doesn't hurt her, and some one else goes safe. And as for the waste—the price of a fare now and then—why, if it suits us to live on *polenta* six days and take our pleasure on the seventh, whose misery is that? I have never yet lacked my

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soldo for the church, or for a neighbour poorer than I."

"And the ideas you are encouraging in her unhappy head! But I will have something to say to that child."

"Reverendo," interposed Oreste, sternly, "by your leave; you are a good man, half a saint, and I am only an ignorant peasant, but there are some things priests and nuns do not understand, and what one does not understand, that one should not meddle with. The signorina understood; she knew well it was neither pride nor vanity in Gioja, but just a kind of *poesia*, which made her like to play the signora. The signorina understood because she herself was full of *poesia*."

"Oh, the signorina, the signorina!" interjected the priest in despair.

"She *knew*," Oreste went on. "You remember the time of the hat, reverendo?"

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"*If* I remember!" groaned the priest.

"*Ebbene*," said Oreste, emphatically, "when I found it out I went straight to the signorina and told her. She was on the terrace, and she sat down and laughed a little—you remember our signorina's way of laughing?"

It was to the priest that he addressed this, but it was the signore, looking straight before him and smiling, who looked as if he remembered.

"Nothing would do," continued Oreste, "but that she must jump into my cab then and there, with only a lace on her head, and she a signorina! (here the signore laughed aloud) and drive straight to Florence, not to one of the small shops, but to the great milliner's on Tornabuoni, where she bought a hat—who knows what it cost?—and she bade me take it to

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Gioja, and tell her to wear it when she liked, for there was nothing wicked about it."

The priest groaned again.

"Only," added Oreste, with the suspicion of a twinkle, "she bade us say nothing about it, lest you, reverendo, might think it your duty to lecture the child again, and it was a pity, she said, to make so good a man uncomfortable. So, as she could not wear it openly, we had to find a way under the plate; and as the whole village would have been talking if we went away together, I had to make that little story of a patron. Once outside of Vignola, I wait for Gioja, and there in the olive grove she makes herself into a signora; and on the way home we stop again, and—the signora's hat and gown stowed away under my seat—my little *sposa* climbs up beside me, and we talk it all over.

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And then the next day I count my francs, and the folk call me '*Birbone*,' and the lads think evil of my Gioja because she would never look at them, and we laugh in our sleeves. What does all that matter when one is happy?"

"And so," said the priest, sternly, "you let all Vignola think your wife has a lover, and say nothing?"

"They have to think something, and isn't it better they should think she has a lover, reverendo, than a *cappello di signora*?"

"Securely," assented the priest, quickly. "A lover, at least, they can all understand, and only too many of them—Madonna pardon them!—have had; but a signora's hat nobody in the village has ever had, and they would never pardon Gioja for having. And they have right; Gioja has no business with a signora's hat—nor you to waste

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your time and money, as if you would be *bambini* all your lives. And for you—a man—to make yourself the servant of your wife—oh, it is shameful, *vergognoso!*”

“Pardon again, reverendo, but that, too, you can't understand. If it is Gioja's *poesia* to play the signora—why, Gioja is *my poesia*. As for its lasting—*altro!* the future is long, and if we had others to feed, all that might be different. She is only a child herself now, but when the good God sends a child to a child, that makes a woman of her. He Himself sees to that. When that comes she will care nothing to play the signora with her stupid Oreste. All this our signorina knew; for that night when the child came to me weeping and saying how wicked she had been, and begging me to forgive her and marry her at once, *at once*—I, signori, who would have married her at any mo-

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ment for years!—it put me in trouble. I had fear to take her like that, and perhaps have her sorry for it later. But I went to our signorina with her, and told her all, and she looked at us both, and said: 'Marry her, Oreste; you safely may'—for the signorina understood. And so—I married her."

The eyes of the two young men met suddenly and exchanged across the gulf of position and race one rapid thrill of comprehension. The priest looked half-timidly at both; but perhaps he, too, comprehended something, for he said, meekly:

"After all, I did no harm."

"Perhaps not," replied Oreste, with his frank smile, "but that was not your fault, reverendo. And now, if the signore and you will excuse me—that was the bell of the Elevation. If Gioja saw you she would have no more pleasure, and that would be all

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the more a pity, because it is our last *festa* here. We are going to live with the signore—and his signora; isn't it so, signore?"

"Ah, ah!" exclaimed the priest, with vivacity, "so that was your *festa* and your fortune, signore? And that is why you have so much sympathy for even the *grilli* and these foolish children! Well, well—it is perhaps the best that could happen, for it would be impossible to go on giving scandal like this, and if I said a word, you would all be for taking my life. It may do for Gioja—who is not like the others—but heaven forbid the other girls should get such ideas in their heads; I have enough to do to keep track of them and their affairs as it is."

"Signori!" said Oreste, warmly. The two slunk behind the next cab, and from there beheld the stream of life suddenly burst from the big doors

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of the Duomo—men and women and children; prince and citizen and peasant; and among them a slender, graceful shape, her signora's hat sitting well upon the ruffled gold of her hair, and her long skirt raised in one gloved hand with a gesture at which the signore's heart beat suddenly faster against the blue envelope above it. So very excellent an imitation of the signora that even an expert need not blush to be deceived by it.

Oreste stepped forward and flung open the cab door with ostentation. The signora mounted languidly, and sank back against the cushions, making a great rustling of silk. The loungers on the Duomo steps stole covert glances at the pretty woman. Then Oreste slammed the door, took off his hat, and approached deferentially.

"*Comanda, signora?*" he said, loud enough for every one to hear.

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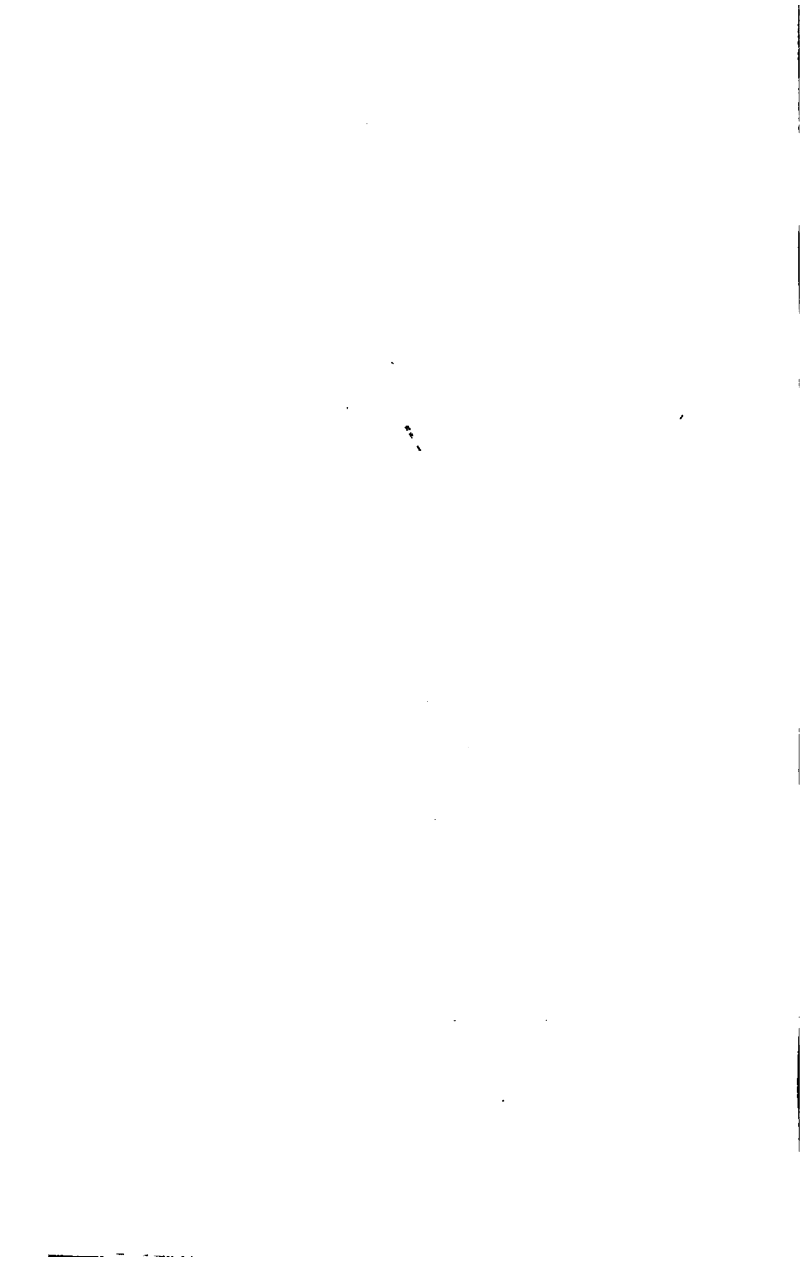
"*Alla casa*—home," responded the signora, with superb languor.

And mounting upon the seat, with a parting glance of mingled triumph and humour in the direction of the two watchers, Oreste, with Elisabetta, and the signora whirled triumphantly away.

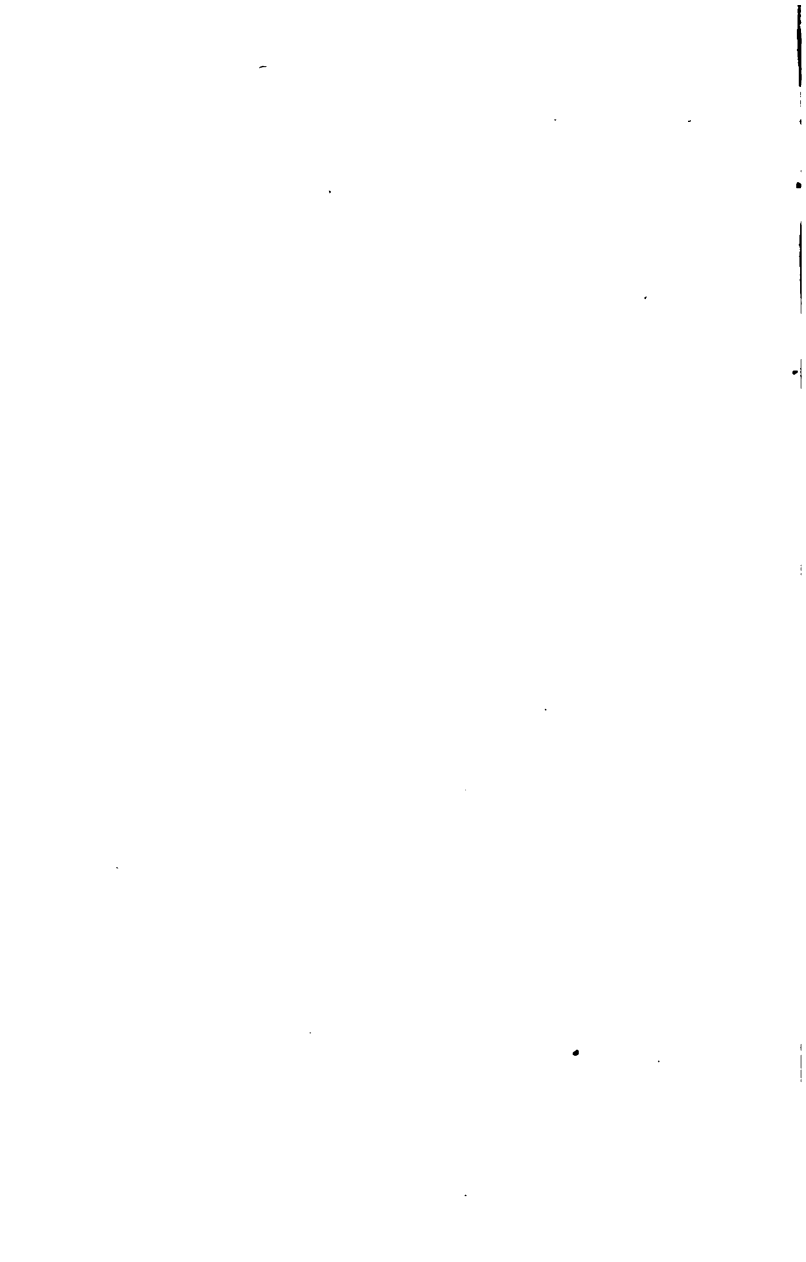
The two left upon the sidewalk remained speechless for a few minutes; then the priest's eye caught his companion's, deprecatingly, but with an echo of Oreste's twinkle.

"That signorina," he said, with an indulgent sigh, "she has much to answer for!"

But the signore, looking into the distance and laughing softly to himself, said not a word.



The Rise of the Vanni



The Rise of the Vanni

The Vanni had been—heaven knows how poor, until that happy thought of putting bath-houses on their worthless strip of land bordering on the beach occurred to them. Then they began to rise in the world, slowly at first, then faster and faster, like a balloon.

First it was a new coat of paint for the hovel back of the bath-houses, then they left the hovel and took a two-story cottage, which they presently rented in the summers, and now it was no longer safe to remember that a Vanni had ever tended a bath-house and been thankful for the *per bere* of a visiting stranger. Every summer they rented the *villino* at a price, and went up into the mountains, where

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one month's rent sufficed them for the season, and the other three nestled snugly in the bank against that of last summer, till there was enough there to buy a warm little vineyard up on the slopes. After that it was Signor and Signora Vanni; the bank officials alone knew with how much reason.

The townspeople wondered till their heads ached what the Vanni would do with all that money. The Vanni themselves were not prompt to decide so weighty a question. There were no children to educate; every one of their five lay in the Campo Santo; and they themselves were too old—half a century of hardship behind them—to learn new ways of wearing their clothes and eating their food which a younger generation would have taught them.

Still, one has one's ambitions, and it is not so much the poor in spirit as the poor-spirited who would consent-

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ingly leave the world before he has cut anything of a figure in it.

The Vanni did not lack spirit, but the places in which one can make a figure in a village like Reggio are few. There is the Piazza (how unnecessary to add that its name is "Vittorio Emmanuele") for the women, the café for the men, and the Campo Santo for everybody. For the first, the Signora Vanni had not the requisite youth, beauty, or courage, being for very shamefacedness unequal to the assumption of any other garb than her neighbours had known her in all her life; for the second, Vanni was the man of fewest words in the town; nor could he, who had passed his whole life in amassing soldi painfully, ever learn the trick of throwing them about. "Something worth while," was what they both aspired to, a judicious expenditure of their money in large

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sums, which should bring forth adequate social returns; and both dimly perceived they could never cope with the rising Felice and Bardi about them, who had the support of a younger generation in Piazza and café. Piazza and café were, then, out of the question; there remained the Campo Santo, and here the younger generation of the Vanni already were.

The Campo Santo is the Champs Elysées and Bois de Boulogne of Reggio; at times it is its Grand Opera. Well to the northward of the sea-bordering town it lies, through a space of woods where, amid falling leaves and blossoming gorse in autumn, on soft green moss in spring, the village foot presses a straggling procession of prints all day long on Sundays, the only day of the seven when the village foot has time to stray. On the special feasts, such as Easter and the Day of the

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Dead, the social life of the year culminates in a veritable pageant—a rivalry of sepulchral gaiety which is to the town what the flower *corso* is to Nice.

Here, within the walled enclosure which held the sorrows and the pride of Reggio, the Vanni brood had occupied successively narrow graves for the allotted ten years, and then been removed to the crypt below the church, which was piled with bones and skulls of the disinterred; for at that time the fortunes of the house of Vanni had not reached to the requisite number of francs which would ensure a separate box of lodgment for what were in sad truth now only “the remains” of the defunct. Thus at Easter and the feast of All-Souls’ the Vanni wandered disconsolate among the complacent throngs, flaunting their funeral wreaths and portraits. They felt themselves

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at a disadvantage even here, and “with five dead ones,” as the Signora Vanni said with sad pride, it did seem hard not to be able to make anything of a mortuary figure. There was her cousin, Lisandrina, who had buried but one, and the to-do she made over that grave every *Giorno dei Morti* was beyond the believable, with her tissue-paper wreaths and natural flowers—the poorest kind of decorations, not a really superior emblem among them. The Signora Vanni often thought how beautiful she would make her five graves now that she had the means, had she only the graves. It was hard, too, she murmured to Vanni, and he brushed away a sympathetic moisture, that their five should not look as well as others—she would name no names.

“When we have put by a little money, Maria, perhaps before another All-Souls’, we will buy one of the lots

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near the wall, and a little tablet will not ruin us," her husband said, for he, too, was vexed not to hold his own in the cemetery.

That was the year they rented their house for the first time, and the amount it gave them made the tablet and lot so possible that—

"I've been thinking," said Vanni one day, as the two sat dipping their peasant bread in thin soup, "after all, a lot like that—what is it for five? and we shall be two more some day. If we waited to rent the *villino* another year, and bought a double lot like that of the Bardi—"

His wife looked up horror-stricken. "The cost!" she exclaimed. "The cost, Giacomo!"

"But when one is doing a thing!" he persisted. "A small lot—that is no more than anybody has—a nothing-at-all; but with one of those large ones,

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one has really something for one's money. And who is there to save for? It is all we can do for the *bambini*, and why should not ours lie as well as any?"

"Well, well," returned the signora, excitedly, "I don't deny it would be something I should take pleasure in always, and it would do us good, even when we are gone. Besides, with five dead it does seem only fitting—only," she added with a sigh, "we shall have nothing this All-Souls'."

"No, but *next*," replied her husband, "we shouldn't make the poorest figure in the Campo Santo — eh, Maria?"

"Yes, yes, you have reason," said the Signora Vanni.

On All-Souls' Day they walked about among the crowd, covertly observing, and the signora nodded when

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her husband looked with contempt at the smaller lots. "You are right—one of those small ones, for five—it would be really indecent. When one has waited so long, one should have the best. I can save something this year; we do not really need soup every day; it is just a habit like another."

They rented again that year, and the Signora Vanni found many small places where she had begun, she said, "to throw away money since they had nothing to spend it on." But she did not throw anything away now; soup every other day was all she asked, for her part. Thus the savings made so good a sum that Vanni, in counting them one day, had "a true inspiration," he said.

"What if we do not buy a lot at all? One can never make anything distinguished of a lot; it is always out of doors, nothing really gives it 'an air';

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but those mortuary chapels which run round two sides of the Campo Santo—those are something to remark upon.”

The Signora Vanni let fall her work and gasped.

“There is one now next to the Dottore Tordi; the Avvocato Mantini wants it, I know, but the poor man has not the *quattrini*.” A smile of satisfaction curled his lips. “What say you, Maria? That would be really an investment.”

Next to the Doctor Tordi! It was as if he said “next to the Archangel Gabriel,” or “on the other side of His Holiness the Pope.” It was going straight among the aristocracy. Those chapels were the show places of the Campo Santo; only the acknowledged gentlefolk lay there; wreaths and lamps hung there more or less all the year, while at Easter and All-Souls’ the walls were gayer than a theatre.

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"Only," said Vanni, reading her emotions in her fluttering breath and moving lids, "I don't say it won't cost us some economies for a year or so. *Altrol!* it will be worth it, and a wreath or two really shows for something on marble; besides, the metal does not tarnish so much in there."

"That is true," replied his wife, grasping at a pretence for calmness. "It will be an economy in the end. I've seen good wreaths, that cost ten francs and ought to last a lifetime, spoiled in five or six years in the sun and fog. And we might economise the wreaths, too, if—" She cast a hesitating glance at Vanni.

"Well, speak out," he said, good-naturedly; he was pleasurably excited himself, for it gratified a man's pride to know he could buy what the *Avvocato* could not.

"If one could do without a flask of

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wine or two—" stammered she, for it is dangerous work attacking a man in his stomach.

"It is our own," muttered Vanni, "and cost us nothing but—"

"Only a flask or two, Giacomo," she hastened to say. "I speak on the part of myself; for a long time I've been thinking I should be better without it," she added, mendaciously.

"Well, well," replied her husband, easily; "you may be right; all stomachs are not alike; I never felt the wine hurt mine any. And if you could manage to do without a new gown—only this year, you understand?—once we have bought the chapel, we shall have no reason to stint ourselves."

"That is true," assented she eagerly. "*Chè!* what do I need; I go nowhere. When we have the chapel to walk to, then it will be another thing; a good gown will only be in keeping."

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"Securely," Vanni consented, cordially. "It will be in better taste to wait till then. For my part I like to do things of a piece."

The vintage was so good that the whole rent and more went into the bank that year, and it was to be noted how deferentially the bank officials saluted the Vanni on the street. It was open talk now in the town that the *Coniungi Vanni* were considering a chapel in the Campo Santo—as, indeed, who had a better right. Every one knew the very day when they drove out to make the selection. Vanni was obliged to keep a horse now, to go to and from the vineyard, and it was lucky, for the Signora Vanni was no longer strong enough for the walk to the cemetery; she did not grow younger, she admitted.

"How we could ever have thought of a lot! It would be like throwing

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money away!" declared Vanni, contemptuously, as he glanced about the Campo Santo. He left his wife to admire some carved cherubs in the chapel of the archangel—that is to say, of the doctor—while he talked a little cautious business with the sacristan. "In a matter like this one must not go too fast," said he, when he returned.

"With 'VANNI' in large letters just outside, and the photographs of the *bambini*, and a wreath, and a lamp—eh, will that make a figure or not?" he asked her sotto voce, with the air of a man who attains his goal.

The signora was gazing straight out into the open square between them and the gates.

"Eh," her husband repeated, jocosely, "what could be better?"

The signora's answer was straightforward, if startling.

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"A monument would be better."

"~~Eh~~—a monument!" Vanni sat down on a near-by grave, and stared at his wife with dropped jaw.

"Yes, a monument," she repeated, with unexpected decision. "A chapel, when all is said, what is it?" She looked with scorn about her. "One is the same as another; there is nothing of original in it. But a monument, taller than these, out there, with your name on it, and a figure, perhaps an angel with a trumpet—there would be nothing in all the town like it."

Vanni sat staring.

"And the cost?" he said at last, ironically.

"*Chè!* a year or two of economies, with the rent, and perhaps a flask or two less of wine or a meal or two more of *polenta*—only what the Church is always advising for our souls' good. And for something really worth while,

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something that makes a *personaggio* of one—”

Vanni rose up straight and took his wife's arm with an admiring glance.

“You have ideas—you! Come, let us go.”

On the way home he waved his hand towards the Carraras:

“Now one knows why they are there,” he said, jestingly; but he was actually so excited that he could scarcely drive, and though she kept quiet, the signora's hands were burning.

Nothing of all that did Vanni show when he talked with the stone-cutters, casually, in the presence of the finest gossip in town, next day. He was as cool as marble; a mere matter of a monument might flutter some folk, but not the Vanni. The impression Cecco carried away and disseminated was that if the Vanni pleased he could

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have set a monument at every corner of the Campo Santo; it was only by the grace of humility that he was contenting himself with one—in the centre.

The town, however, was different. It had never seen a marble monument, the most being the broken bust of the "Re Galantuomo," in the piazza of his name. Nothing was talked of now but the Vanni monument, even at election time; in fact, it was hinted more than once that a worse man might be chosen *deputato* than one who could honour himself and the town with monuments when he chose. There was something now really to walk to the Campo Santo for; first the pedestal, then a superstructure, cunningly made, with a marble canopy, and four little angels blowing trumpets at the corners; then a tall shaft soaring right up against the blue, with a

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great angel blowing a great trumpet on top. It towered above everything in the place, and could be seen a long way from the grove beyond. When one entered the cemetery, there it was—the first thing, the last thing, in fact, the only thing; and there it was for everlasting. The church could not be seen for it, and as for the mortuary chapels—how much better it would have been for them if they could not be seen, either! And on that marble shaft, in tall relief, went the letters

V A N N I

It was as if the angel blew them at you through his trumpet.

It is not to be supposed all this was accomplished in a day, nor a year; that great angel, in particular, went near to break their hearts in the attainment. He was not in the original design at all, but somehow demonstrated his own necessity—became vital

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to the shaft as it soared upwards. It was not the little renunciations of wine and soup, nor the sacrifice of such small things as could possibly be accounted—by that angel—luxuries, that wore upon the Vanni spirit; but to see one's whole bank account go was not to be done without a qualm, and there was the final great economy of letting the *villino* go and moving into a much lesser one. It would bring a lesser rent, also, but then they were agreed a lesser rent would suffice, once the angel affixed to the shaft in perpetuity; and in fine, it was a question between the angel or the *villino*. The angel won. Moreover, the Signora Vanni declared with reason that the care of a very small house was all she felt equal to, so it would be a positive blessing on the monument to begin with. Such was the position of the Vanni in the respect of his fellow-

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townsmen now that he might have returned to his original hovel, had it pleased him, and suffered no diminution. It would have passed for an eccentricity merely.

"The angel will be in place next week, and there are ten days to All-Souls'," said Vanni, in a tone of satisfaction, to his wife. "You must make haste to be able to drive there." For there were not many days on which the signora could drive now; she got about the house, even small as it was, with difficulty.

"What she needs is red wine and nourishing food—a chicken every day or two, and broth, strong broth," said Doctor Tordi himself, whom Vanni had called in in affright when his wife suddenly fainted. The signora nearly fainted again at his words. Wine and chicken she had in aversion, she declared with vehemence, and the

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smell of broth—strong broth—made her ill.

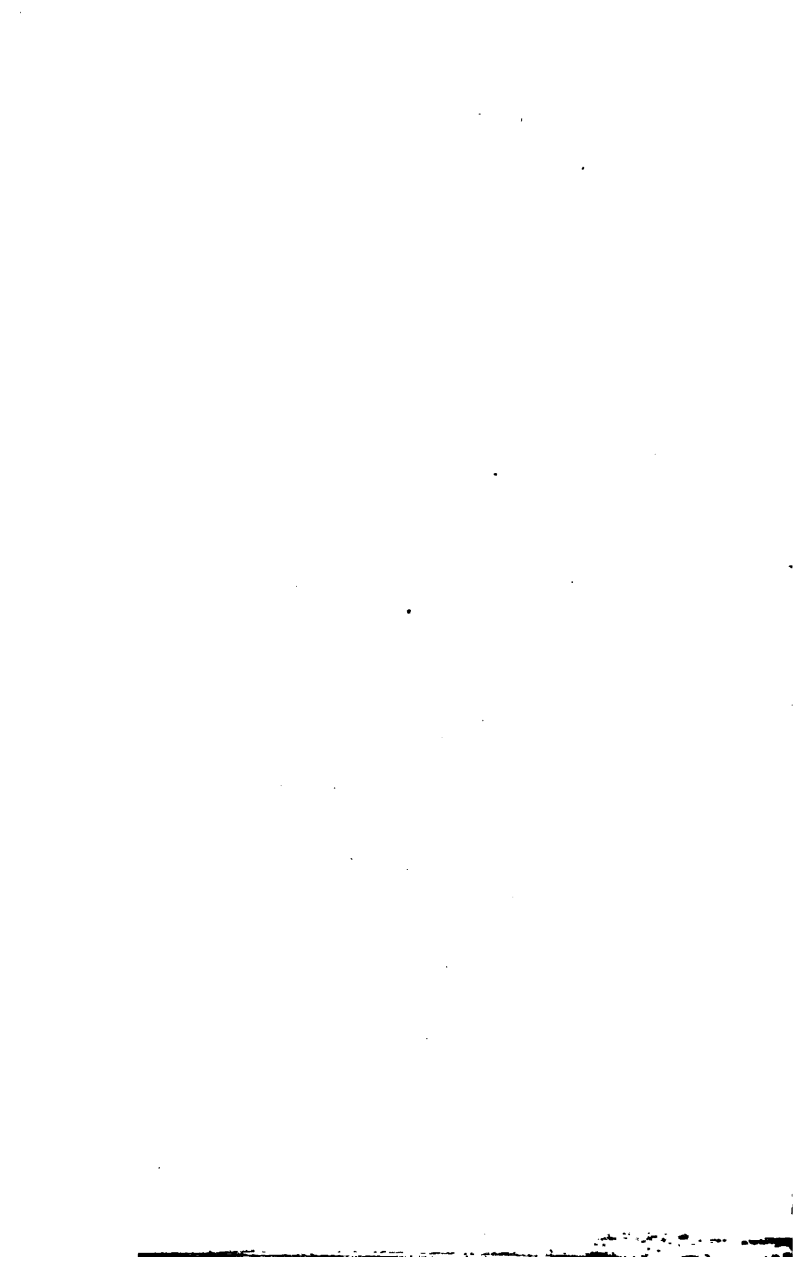
That which the neighbourly mistress of the *pensione* opposite sent over, however, undoubtedly prolonged her life a few days.

On the Day of the Dead the whole town turned out to witness Vanni, a broad black band on his sleeve, deposit at the feet of the triumphant angel a large metal wreath, with streamers of black ribbon four inches wide—"To the memory of my wife and five children."

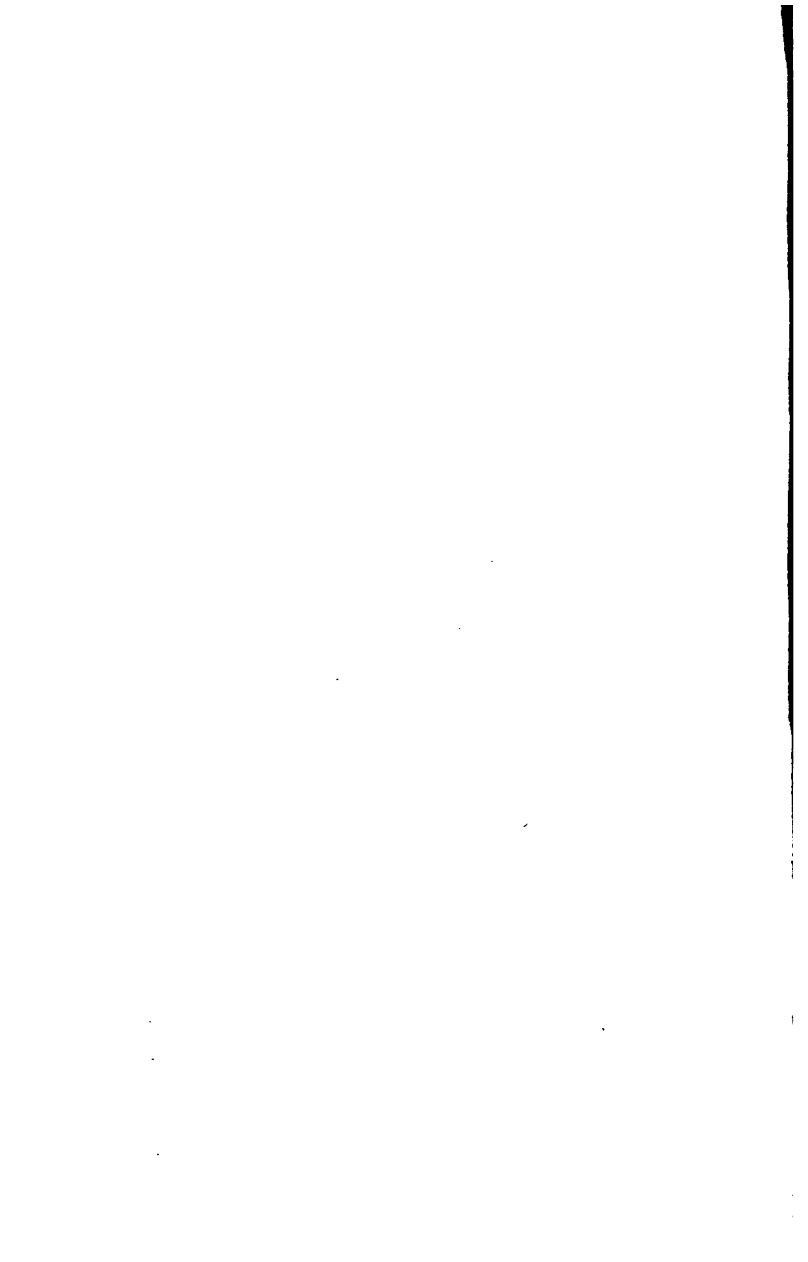
"Ah, if she could only see it now!" he thought, withdrawing a pace in admiration, and wiping away a tear of mingled pride and grief.

Those who stood near wiped their eyes also, in sympathy.

The next year they made him deputy by unanimous vote.



A Wise Little Fool



A Wise Little Fool

They did not call her wise in the Piazzetta where she lived — the tiny square at the junction of several narrow, dark Florentine streets, a stone's throw away from the great Square of the Cathedral.

"*Pazza*—fool!" was the best name they had for her. Not even the mother who loved her, and alone dimly understood her, because she was her mother, ever thought of calling Angiolina wise.

"*Poverina* — poor little one," she would say, excusingly, to the neighbours when they cast scornful glances at the child sitting dreaming over her straw work, or even forgetting her portion of coarse bread in watching the

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doves circling over the roofs between the little Piazza and the great one.

Beppe, bold and sturdy, or quick Annina, sometimes stole up surreptitiously and appropriated the uneaten bread, and the neighbours applauded their cleverness.

"Let her go hungry; *I* would," said Paola, next door, contemptuously. "That will teach her to keep her eyes at home. She works no more than a *colombina* herself—a useless piece! Look at my Paolina there—all her straw finished, and not a *braccia* of Angiolina's done. Any of my six can do more in a day. I say who has the wit to get the bread, eats it, in this world."

"She is not like the others, *poverina*, but she is no fool," Angiolina's mother replied. Nevertheless, she sighed, and scolded the child in the presence of the neighbours: but secretly she could

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not resist giving her another morsel of bread, while affecting to scold all the harder.

For what Paola said was too true. Any child in the Piazza could turn out more "arms" of hat-braid a day; and in times when the most skilful could make but three or four soldi by a full twelve hours' toil, it was hard to see a girl with ten fingers sit mooning over a lapful of straw, gazing after those useless *colombine*.

"If one had them in a pot, or turning round and round on a spit, all brown and juicy," said Paola, smacking her lips at the image—"altro! I could stare at them myself. It is long enough since I or mine tasted such. But up there, where they do nobody any good—and eating corn enough for a Christian—it makes one enraged!"

And who could blame Paola, eating only corn meal herself from one year

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to another, if she thanked the good God for one thing: not one *passa* like that in all her six!

Chiara, Angiolina's mother, knew there was reason in what Paola said, but still she could not, as she said, think her child quite a fool. Her braid was the straightest, her fingers the deftest, once they could be got to work. And she had such a good heart, too—never answering one back, with her little pale, unscared face. But clumsy, dull Rosina could be depended upon to turn out her three *braccie* a day as regularly as the sun rose above the Apennines and set over the Carraras, and Annina her six baskets, while nobody ever knew how much or how little Angiolina might do.

She would sit down with the very best of resolutions in the morning, her fingers flying among the straw, and presently it was a procession of chant-

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ing priests, or the doves circling about the tower, or it was only a face that pleased her, and there she was, miles away, though her body still sat in the doorway with culpable small hands idle upon the straw. What can be said of a girl who will indulge in fancies upon three cents a day? Only a mother's heart is large enough to cover such foolishness.

"Still, she is no fool!" Old Luigi, who made a living picking up cigar-ends at night, and found even that to pay better than straw work, and whose eyes by constant peering may have developed a second sight, said it, too. "She is no fool, that sees itself in those big eyes of hers."

When she was sent to carry home the finished braid, then it was her feet that lingered—most of all in the great Piazza of the Duomo, where in the

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niches of the many-coloured marbles nested the doves, or came, an avalanche of wings, upon the stones below at the throwing of a handful of yellow grain.

Angiolina's dream was to possess a soldo of her own and buy one of those papers of corn. There was a little foreigner about her own age who came daily to feed the doves, drawing soldo after soldo from an apparently unlimited bank in her small pocketbook. The doves fed from her hand and perched upon her shoulders and the lovely daisy-wreathed hat which crowned her golden hair. Angiolina stood opposite and regarded this child with admiration. The doves clung to her fingers, greedily pushing each other away, and the little American laughed aloud. Angiolina laughed, too, and clapped her hands—when, behold! a whirling mass of doves rose and flew,

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every last dove of them, to the top of the Campanile. The little American girl looked reproachfully at Angiolina, who hung her head, and picking up her basket scurried home, to be scolded once more by the poor mother.

The image of the child in the Piazza haunted Angiolina as she sat working. It tangled itself with the yellow straw, which began to take on shapes of it. Now it was the golden hair of the signorina; now it was one of the yellow daisies on her hat. Angiolina felt sure she could make straw daisies—yes, even a hat. Her fingers began stealthily to shape one; they were swift fingers when the heart beat in them, and before dusk she was delightedly regarding a tiny hat, fashioned like the little American's, even to a wreath of straw flowers.

Her mother's step broke the spell, and thrusting the wee *cappello* beneath

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her skirt she fell guiltily to work—really guilty this time, for the straw belonged to the manufacturer, and every inch would have to be accounted for. There, also, was the tell-tale braid in her lap, strictly measured every day, and which had not grown a finger's length in all this making of flowery hats. And here, just in time to witness her confusion, came the good old priest from the little church beyond.

"I am in despair!" exclaimed Chiara, her patience exhausted. "Not a *braccia* of straw to-day, and I with seven to feed!"

"And half her good bread wasted on those wretched *colombine*—I myself saw it. What do you say to that now, Chiara?" cried Paola's triumphant voice. "Oh, if she were mine, I know what she would get!"

"What am I to do with her, Father?"

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said Chiara, tearfully. "She has her head full of these little beasts, as if they were Christians!"

The Father looked mildly at the small guilty figure. Perhaps there were not too many of his people troubled with this peculiar form of wickedness.

"Let be, let be," he said, indulgently. "Our good Saint Francis loved them and preached to them; perhaps his spirit is in this little one. Only, *figlia mia*," he added, gravely, laying a kind hand on the downcast head, "though it is not a sin to share your crumbs with the *colombine*, not to help your good mother is a very great sin. God will be displeased with you otherwise, and you will never arrive to be truly an *angiolina*, with shining white wings like those there. Remember that, my daughter."

The gentle reproof went home to

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the child's heart, for she loved her mother not less—perhaps more—than the others did. It was only the ideas which would come in spite of herself and make her forget.

Why did the good God give her ideas if they displeased Him? she wondered. But perhaps it was not the good God at all, but the devil. She stole quietly round the corner, and drew out the small hat cautiously, to consider whether it were really an inspiration of the devil. It did not look diabolical, but wholly beautiful; still the priest always said you could not trust to that—God had allowed that wicked *diavolo* to be so very clever.

“Oh, the dear little hat! It will just fit Arthur. Mama, mayn't I buy it? Ask her how much it is, please.”

And there was the little American girl on her way to the Piazza, with her curly-haired doll in her arms.

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"How much is the little hat?" inquired the lady, kindly, in Italian; and as Angiolina only stood dumbly staring, she took out a franc-piece and held it up. The little hat was snatched suddenly from Angiolina's hands.

"Santa Maria! child, are you a fool indeed?" screamed Paola. "A whole franc for that nothing-at-all! But take it—take it, signora!"

"If the child is willing, only," said the lady, hesitating.

"If she is willing! a whole week's pay for that *sciochezza*! Chiara—here, Chiara! Look what your *pazzina* here has done!" exclaimed Paola, as Angiolina's mother hurried out, expecting some fresh calamity.

"Here is this signora," she added, volubly, "offering a week's pay for that foolishness, a *bambolina's* hat, and that simpleton of yours has not wit to take it."

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"But—how—did you make it, Angiolina?" stammered Chiara, and as the child dropped her head guiltily, "But it is really a beautiful little hat! Take it, signora, take it!" for the sight of the franc-piece fairly set her trembling.

Angiolina watched furtively while the hat was fitted on the doll's curls, mutely accepting the turn events had taken. She even felt a thrill of delight to see the little hat upon the doll.

"It is beautifully made," said the lady. "Did you make it, my child?"

Angiolina nodded.

"If you will make me half a dozen such, I will pay you a franc for every one."

Chiara and Paola exchanged glances. Six weeks' work! Chiara's head spun.

"Say yes, child, and thank the signora," said Paola, nudging her.

Angiolina nodded again, with bright

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eyes. Not only to be allowed to make little hats, but to be paid for doing it! and no scolding! It was not the devil, then, but God.

"Six francs at a word!" exclaimed Paola, lifting her hands, when the signora and the signorina were gone. "So that's why her braid is never done; but it hasn't turned out so badly this time. Six francs! you are a lucky one, Chiara; and let me tell you this: there are other signoras! Get one of the shops to take the *cappellini*; they'll give you no franc, but twenty-five centesimi, even, for one of those! That Angiolina has done a stroke of work this time."

"Whoever taught you, Angiola *mia*, to make the little hat?" asked her mother.

"The good God," answered Angiolina, confidently.

Even the making of little hats could

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not stay the busy brain from other fancies, though it was far pleasanter than weaving the monotonous yards of braid. The while she worked she wondered about the little American girl—what it must feel like to have beautiful clothes and dolls and golden curls. When no one was looking she made herself curls of straw and held them to her own dark curly head. And then she fancied herself standing in the sunlight, with all the soldi one wanted, and doves—doves clinging to your fingers, and perching on your shoulders, all those lovely, white-winged, bright-eyed, glancing things.

She tried with furtive crumbs to coax the stray ones, but they kept sagaciously beyond the border of her gown, and some one—Paola or Bep-pina or Rosina—was sure to come, heavy-footed, and frighten them away.

On the day when the last of the hats

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had been carried home and paid for—six whole francs—Angiolina's mother handed the child a whole five-centesimi piece—that is to say, a whole cent.

“Thou hast worked like a good child, Angiolina; this is for thee,” she said.

Three minutes after, the child's place was vacant.

Out on the great square, in the sunlight, at the foot of the world-famous tower, stood a little figure, half-hidden in a cloud of wings—doves in her arms, on her shoulders, about her head. She felt the tiny hearts beating, the shiny wings rustling, the wee feet clinging to her fingers, and the bright eyes glanced into her own shining ones. She had her dream at last.

Some passers-by stopped to watch the pretty sight.

“Look, Louis!” exclaimed a lady; “that is the very child I told you of—

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the little maker of hats. See what a lovely expression and what eyes."

Then a brown hand thrust another cornucopia of grain into Angiolina's hand.

"Child," said a man's kind voice, in broken Italian, "I will give you as much corn as you like if you will let me sketch you so. And if you will let me make a picture of you and the doves, I will give you a franc for every hour until the picture is finished. Will you do it, little one?"

"*Si, si, oh, si!*" Angiolina answered, looking without fear or shyness straight into the stranger's eyes, with her own beaming.

"Take me to your home, then, that I may talk with your mother," said the young man, smiling. And dropping the rest of the corn, Angiolina all but flew before them, so lightly did her happy feet touch the ground.

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It can be imagined whether the poor Chiara consented, and how the neighbourhood gathered afterwards to talk it over breathlessly.

"Well, of all the cleverness!" exclaimed Paola; "and so bold! to plant herself right there where the signore *pittore* was bound to see her. Every day he goes by to his studio. She has ideas—that Angiolina. But if ever I'd thought there was money in it, my five should feed those pigs of doves all day, let it cost six cents a day!"

"The Angiolina is not quite a fool, then, after all, Paola?" Chiara could not help saying, proudly.

"Hm—that's as may be. In my mind he must be a fool who would paint such a little pale thing and all those porks of doves," replied Paola, with a shrug, retreating.

"All the same," confided old Luigi to Angiolina's mother, later, "though

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she won't eat her words to you, I heard her say to that great fat Paolina of hers just now: 'Go to the Piazza to-morrow—do you hear, stupid, and take Ida with you; she has the reddest cheeks of you all. And place yourself where the painter signore will see you when he goes by. You have no ideas—you! Watch that Angiolina, and do what she does—idiots!' " and Luigi laughed heartily, while Chiara smiled with pride.

"But I tell you this," added Luigi; "it will do her no good if she sends all five; none of them care for those droll ones up there—the *colombine*—unless it be to eat them. Neither do I. But the Angiolina is different; she has a heart like that good Saint the Father tells of, and it sees itself in her face. That is why the signore wished to paint it. And she thinks beautiful things in her head, and they make

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themselves with her little clever fingers, and the signore *forestiere* buy them. There is no going against such, for it is the doing of God."

"You may be right, Luigi," answered Chiara, wiping away a tear of pride and tenderness; "*I* never thought her a fool—not I."

And thus the little fool became suddenly the wise one of the Piazza; for the only way they knew to judge between folly and wisdom was by success.

The Piazzetta is not so very different from the world, after all.

